LATVIA:

A Path Chosen Twice

1917-1940

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Documentary Account

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Falsifiers of history love to dwell on the supposed "enslavement" of the Lettish and other Baltic peoples. The purpose of this falsification is to throw doubt upon the choice these peoples made in favour of socialism and unity with the Soviet Union. Fabrication of such myths has become an organic component of the ideological war the West is waging against the USSR.

We prefer to rely on documented historical facts, on which the present account is entirely based. But to begin with a brief history of the Lettish people is in order.

In the 13th century the Teutonic Knights conquered the Lettish tribes with fire and sword. In 1561, Livonia, then a colonial state formation, fell to Tsar Ivan the Terrible of Russia. After the war with Sweden, which had laid claim to the Lettish lands, Russia annexed Latvia's northern regions in the beginning of the 18th century, and its southern and eastern regions in the latter half of the century. Despite this, German barons continued to oppress the Letts for a long time. Even 100 years after the Russian annexation a large portion of Latvian lands was still in the hands of the Germans, though their population there made up only about eight per cent of the total.

The lands of Latvia did not form a single administrative area when they were part of the Russian Empire. The historical province of Vidzeme and Estonia's southern districts formed Liflandia, Kurzeme and Zemgale made up Kurlandia, while Latgale was a part of Vitebsk Gubernia. The early abolition of*

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* Gubernia—the main administrative-territorial unit in Russia made up of districts.

serfdom in Latvia brought about the rapid development of capitalism there. By the end of the 19th century Riga, Latvia's biggest city, became one of the Russian Empire's largest industrial centres. In terms of the number of workers, it held third place after Moscow and St. Petersburg. It was then that the first big wave of revolutionary activity swept Latvia. In June 1904 the Lettish Social-Democratic Labour Party (LSDLP) illegally held its first congress in Riga.

From the outset, the Lettish revolutionaries favoured a close alliance with the Russian proletariat. During the first Russian revolution a conference of the LSDLP held in April 1906 proposed that that party unite, together with other Social-Democratic organisations of Russia, into "a single Social-Democratic Labour Party with a common programme and tactics of struggle". Soon the LSDLP merged with the RSDLP** and became known as the Social Democrats of Latvia, an organisation of the RSDLP.*

The close unity of the workers of Latvia and the whole of Russia was further cemented in the crucible of the revolutionary events of 1917-1920. The Lettish riflemen's regiments—national military formations—later became one of the first Red Army units and fought on the most crucial fronts of the Civil War (1918-1920). In June 1919 the newly-established Soviet Republic of Latvia concluded a military alliance with the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet

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* The revolution of 1905-1907—the first Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution.

** The Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks), now known as the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union). At its first congress in 1898 it was named the RSDLP and in 1917—the RSDLP(B). In March 1918, because after the triumph of the socialist revolution its main aim was to build a communist society, Lenin proposed that it be renamed the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). In 1925 it became the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and in 1952 the 19th Party Congress renamed it the CPSU.

At the 2nd Party Congress in 1903 the delegates supporting the Party programme submitted by Lenin became known as the Bolsheviks (majority), while those supporting the programme of Martov were called the Mensheviks (minority). In 1917 the latter left the Party.

Republic and the other Soviet republics. Peteris Stučka, distinguished Lettish revolutionary, eminent statesman of Soviet Russia and head of the first Soviet government in Latvia, wrote in 1920 (by that time the interventionists had put an end to Soviet power in Latvia):*

"The Lettish proletariat can proudly refer to the traditions of joint struggle and organisation, which for many years linked the small Latvia with the Russian communistic proletariat. With great joy we shall hail the day when Latvia will become reunited with the great Russia on the basis of the Soviet system... The struggle of the Lettish working class for Soviet power will not stop for a minute. And in this struggle we shall look for ways to become reunited with the birthplace of the world revolution—Soviet Russia."

And this day came at last. The present account gives an insight into this event. The account is based on the extensive research conducted by Latvian historians and archivists who located and published documents and materials dating back to the period of the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 and the Socialist Revolution of 1940. Prepared by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Latvian SSR and the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR (editorial board—V. Karaļuns, N. Neilands, I. Ronis; compilers—A. Spreslis and E. Žagars), this collection of materials has been published under the title "Restoration of Soviet Power in Latvia and Entry of the Latvian SSR into the USSR: Documents and Materials".

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* Peteris Stučka (1865-1932), one of the founders of Social Democracy in Latvia. He was a member of the government of Soviet Russia. As People's Commissar of Justice he participated in the drawing up of the Constitution of the RSFSR.

"A FREE LATVIA IN A FREE RUSSIA"

Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Russian working class, wrote:

"During the revolution the Lettish proletariat and the Lettish Social-Democratic Party occupied one of the first and most prominent places in the struggle against the autocracy and all the forces of the old order."*

One of the reasons for the high level of class activity among the Lettish working people was "the higher development of capitalism, both in town and countryside, the greater clarity and definiteness of the class contradictions, their aggravation by national oppression, the concentration of the Lettish population and its superior cultural development."**

And indeed Latvia was among the more industrially developed regions of the Russian Empire. On the eve of the First World War in 1913 Latvia had 1,253 industrial enterprises employing a total of 138,700 workers. The size of the overall salaried labour force in towns was more than 271,000 workers, and the total number of hired workers in the countryside was 623,000. Together with families the proletarian population equaled 1.6 to 1.7 million, or at least 61 per cent of the total population. The overwhelming majority of the urban and rural proletariat supported the revolutionary Social Democrats, giving no support at all to the other political trends. The Social Democrats

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* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 260.
** *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

LA LUTTE Organe Central de la Socialdémocratie Lettonne.

Krewijas Sozialdemokratiskā Strahdneeku Partija.

Zihņa

Wisu semju proletarieschi, sawienojaties!

Mes sihnas naw aswaras!

Latwijas Sozialdemokratijas Zentralorgans

Nr. 133. | 3. julijā (20. junijā) 1914. g. | 11. gads.

Mubsu partijas jubileja.

(1904.—1914.)

Latwijas proletariats un zemkopigee lauzineeki ir pirmee bijuschi pretim Krahmera partijai. Latwijas Sozialdemokratijas, **desmit gadu jubileja.**

Kas tad neiskaustos atzigsees? Kas tad gan warretu domāt, ka mubsu partijai — tikai desmit gadu? Kad patees wehl tik ilgstoschi tumsā tiki Latwijas strahdneeku politiskā organisazija, kurai jau uz dsimtenes pagahtnes, kuŗa wiņa iepreekschā un dsihwojoschā paaudsē tik daudsi nesalaužamu, tik spehzigu un tik neatlaidigu darbineeku un sihmjumu atstahjusi, kuŗas wahrdu ar tik dsihwu interesi un tik lihdsjutigu sirdi wehl tagad tik daudsi latweeschu zeltā?

Ja, kas tumsā dsihwo, tas ilgojas pehz gaismas, tas stingri saorganizejas un galigi apwerahsees partijai Latwijas Sozialdemokratijai wehl tikai 10 gadu.

Zilweks, tas daudsi, daudsi agrak mubsu semē eerahdijas nekā ir pehdigi bihgschanas un kaunas pilnus dsimschanas starpbrihschus sawā dsihwē. Ja wehl gribetum wirst Latwijas sozialdemokratijai tikai tā dsimschanas brihdi, tad mums tagad nahktos tai wirst wismas 10, bet gan 20 un pat 25 gadu jubileju. Kad wiņa partijas tehwam Dihzkalna Jahnim tas eemesls bija gadot, ka wiņi sawā 10 gadu jubilejā "nesihmumu" ka jau tādu gadu sahkumā ogsalīnus nedrihkst un saturs — tihdi ar dsihwām zihņas „jaunstrahdneeku" studinatiem progresiwakus dsihwē — tapehz pasihstamus latweeschu intelligenzes wairakus dalus un uz atzihtakeem strahdneekeem. Wiņam to pirmeem sozialismu studinatajeem Latwijā, kreetns „Ē", nekad nebija, ka 1904. gada rudenī runat nesaudsi par Latwijas sozialdemokratijas „dsimschanas deenu", ja schiņi rudenī „jaunā strahdneeku nedehlā" wairak nā weenā numurā nolasija nekahdu . . . Ar drihsu, nedrihsu mehginajumu dibinat Latwijā proletariskas organisazijas atlezas jau uz 1903. gadu sahkumu un rudeni, kā latweeschu sozialisma pahraudsa, uz kahdu gan pahraudsa tihkoja gaidit, wairak nepehja to wairs aptaisit. Ja redsam, ka jau pehz kahdas gadu desmitā sahk ilgoschi sozialdemokratiskais „Kuschkis", latweeschu strahdneeku „Peterburgas un literarisskais nedehlas rakstu krahjums", un tas wiņam kaweklim par spihti nirud kā seltaini sili Latwijā. Un wehl gadu wehlak (1906. gadu beigās) tam pee wecpatas „Latweeschu Strahdneeks", kuŗa ilgstoschi sazihnijahs „Wisas Krewijas Latweeschu Sozialdemokratu Darbineeki", un kuŗam jau nedsihwus it seschi sakot uz apsihmigeem strahdneekeem Latwijā . . . Latwijas lauku strahdneeki sawu pirmo sozialismu ganja Latwijā, un atsewischkas sozialdemokratiskas strahdneeku grupas tad redsi gan wehl pee wisas zeetas tizibas sawai wairakumā ruhpigeem centros (Rigā, Liepajā, Jelgawā, Wentspilī), bet arī tahlakur uz lauzineem . . . Wiņai bijuschi tee nopelni, ka ratsija pirmeetes „Latw. Strahdneeka" lasitaji pirmajā numurā. Tur sweeds tika aprakstits par 1905.—07. gada notikumeem un par politiskas apsagtas nepareisibam un negehlibam un darba [illegible] tehwam, kuŗiem wiņi kā pratuschi palihdsinaja.

. . . Tikai wahja nespehdeja atjaunot wehs wairak pateikteem par to, ka mums tagad tā dehwa sozialisma nawiņa un brukstoschas, tapehz ka Latwijas proletariats un materialā nabadsiba un apspiesta latweeschu strahdneeku sozialista sajuta. Tikai steigas mahkoņa drukatu darbineeku wairakumā pateikteem par to, ka wiņi tikai tajas pilsehtas nepahtraus sozialdemokratiskos strahdneeku kustibas un darba sahkus. Bet gan tapehz ka wiņi tikai pilsehtas nepahtraus sozialdemokratiskos strahdneeku kustibas un darba sahkus.

Tapehz gan, ka laikā nahk darbs ar pilsehtneeku un darbu politiskibā

of Latvia (SDL) formed one of the Bolshevik Party's strongest organisations, with a membership of 11,000 in 1906.

During the First World War the SDL upheld firm internationalist positions and resolutely opposed the fratricidal war.

In 1915, on the initiative of the Lettish bourgeoisie, Lettish riflemen's battalions and, later, regiments numbering over 40,000 officers and men were formed. Soon after the February 1917 Bourgeois-Democratic Revolution the Lettish riflemen's regiments, with the exception of a small number of officers, adopted the revolutionary platform of the SDL.

Dual Power

It is not surprising, therefore, that as soon as the tsarist autocracy was overthrown in Russia the SDL emerged from underground to become one of the strongest political parties. When news of the revolution in Petrograd became known in Riga, an organisational committee of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies* was formed on the initiative of the Riga organisation of the Social Democrats of Latvia on March 2(15). Five days later, a Soviet comprising 39 deputies was elected. In April the Riga Soviet had 117 deputies, in May—305, and in June—475. By the end of July the number of electors voting for deputies to the Riga Soviet had reached 90,000. The Riga Soviet and its presidium were under the leadership of the SDL. Soviets of Workers' Deputies were created in all the towns and villages of Vidzeme, the central and northern part of Latvia, in which the revolutionary Social Democrats played a leading role. It was only in Latgale, the eastern part of Latvia and then a part of Vitebsk Gubernia, that Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks held dominant positions until November 1917.

Over April and May, on the initiative of the SDL, Soviets of Landless Peasants were created in all of the 239 *volosts* (rural districts) of Vidzeme.

However, the situation in Latvia naturally reflected the conditions that existed throughout Russia. In those days so-called dual power existed in the country. In addition to revolutionary

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* The name of a Soviet was determined by the section of society that took part in its formation. For this reason the Soviets mentioned in this text will have various names.

Formed during the First World War the Lettish riflemen's regiments became a reliable support of the Bolshevik Party as early as May 1917.
In the photo: above—the Lettish riflemen on the way to Riga (1917); below—a group of riflemen of the Valmiera Regiment of the Riga Front.

bodies of power, the Soviets, there were commissars of the bourgeois Provisional government in the provinces and districts. In order to consolidate the authority of the Provisional government, the commissars endowed the *zemstvos** with powers of self-government. The openly reactionary mayor of Riga, Andrejs Krastkalns, was appointed commissar of the Provisional government in Liflandia. Since there were no zemstvos in the Baltic countries, the bourgeoisie hastened to set up provisional zemstvo councils. To this end, a "sejm"—a bourgeois assembly—was convocated in Valmiera on March 12-13 (25-26), 1917, which established the Vidzeme Provisional Zemstvo Council and declared it the self-governing authority of the province.

In May 1917 three agricultural societies of well-to-do farmers formed the Peasant League, which became their political organisation. Kārlis Ulmanis, an agronomist, became one of its leaders. Since the Peasant League expressed the interests of the rural bourgeoisie, the majority of the rural population, the landless peasants, did not support it.

Developments soon revealed that the positions of the Provisional government in Latvia were shaky. In March 1917 the Riga Soviet of Workers' Deputies passed a vote of "no confidence" on the commissar of the province, arrested him and replaced him with Andrejs Priedkalns, Latvian Social Democrat. On April 16-18 (April 29-May 1), 1917 the landless peasants held a congress in Valmiera and passed the following resolution:

"The Vidzeme Provisional Zemstvo Council is an organisation of the propertied rural classes. Therefore, it does not enjoy the confidence of the public at large and has no right to take decisions on questions affecting the entire population."

On May 11 (24), 1917 the Riga Soviet of Workers' Deputies passed a vote of "no confidence" on the bourgeois Provisional government. A similar position was adopted by the 2nd Congress of the Lettish Riflemen's Regiments held in Riga on May 12-17 (25-30). That congress elected an Executive Committee of the Soviets of Lettish Riflemen's Regiments (Iskolastrel), which was mainly made up of Latvian Social Democrats. Thus, the 40,000-strong Lettish riflemen's regiments became the armed force of the Latvian socialist revolution.

By June 1917 the revolutionary SDL, having won the majority

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* *Zemstvo*—elected local self-government bodies in Russia.

of seats in the Soviets in Vidzeme, became the main political force in Latvia.

On July 29-30 (August 11-12), 1917 the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Landless Peasants' Deputies assembled in Riga. Sixty-one of the assembled 69 delegates were members of the SDL.* They elected 27 people, who were all SDL members, to form the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Latvia (Iskolat), whose presidium was headed by Otto Kārklinš, a Bolshevik. The Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Landless Peasants' Deputies of Latvia decided:

"To take a direct and active part in the solution of all questions bearing on Latvia...; to prepare a broad revolutionary base for the time when all power will go over into the hands of the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Landless Peasants' Deputies, so that revolutionary democracy will be able to consolidate the achievements of the revolution, promote them and rule out all possibility of the old order being restored."

The elections to the town councils and provincial zemstvo council, which were being held for the first time on the basis of universal suffrage with direct and secret ballot and proportional representation, revealed the real balance of forces in Latvia. Elections to the Riga city council were held on August 13 (26), 1917. Though many of the industries and industrial workers had been evacuated, the SDL won 60,654 votes (41 per cent of the total). In Valmiera it won 18 of the 28 seats in the town council (64 per cent). In Limbazi the SDL received 70 per cent of the vote and in Alūksne, 62 per cent.

On August 21 (September 3), 1917 the Germans marched into Riga. Just before that elections to the Vidzeme Zemstvo

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* Among the 61 delegates, members of the SDL, there were six Menshevik internationalists who remained in the ranks of the Party and obeyed the decisions of its leading bodies. When Riga fell on August 21 (September 3), 1917 nearly all of them remained in the city, but no longer participated in the work of the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Landless Peasants' Deputies of Latvia. Under the German occupation, the Menshevik internationalists collaborated with the bourgeoisie and no longer obeyed the leading bodies of the SDL. In May 1918 the 16th Conference of the SDL expelled them from the party ranks. In June 1918 the Menshevik internationalists convened their own conference to found the opportunistic Social-Democratic Labour Party of Latvia. In the beginning its membership was small. After the bourgeoisie established its rule in Latvia in 1919-1920 this party gradually became stronger. It united the petty-bourgeois elements and a part of the workers. From 1920 to 1933, the Social-Democratic Labour Party of Latvia was the biggest party in the country and the Sejm. It pursued a policy of collaboration with the bourgeoisie.

Council were held, in which the SDL won a sweeping victory. It secured 24 of the 40 seats, with the Peasant League winning 14 and the remaining two going to the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Radical Democrats. The elections to the district zemstvo councils showed the popularity of the Social Democrats to an even greater degree. They won 75 per cent of the seats in the Valmiera District, 69 per cent in the Valka and 64 per cent in the Cēsis District.

Revolutionary Democracy

On October 25 (November 7), 1917 there was a successful socialist revolution in Petrograd (now Leningrad) and the bourgeois Provisional government was overthrown. The Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets announced that it was taking over power in the country and that all power in the localities was being assumed by the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies. The Congress adopted the Decree on Peace and the Decree on Land. It also formed the first Soviet government—Council of People's Commissars—with Vladimir Lenin at the head.

Because the SDL was the leading political force in Latvia and enjoyed the overwhelming support of the population, the Soviets there did not meet with any serious difficulties when they took over power. The Lettish riflemen's regiments met with no resistance as they entered the district centres of Cēsis, Valmiera and Valka. On November 8-9 (21-22), 1917 an extended meeting of the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Latvia (Iskolat) was held in Valka, which adopted a resolution proclaiming Soviet power in Latvia. That document read in part:

"As represented by the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Landless Peasants' Deputies, revolutionary Latvia is abolishing the remnants of the old government and taking power into its own hands. It is sending its comradely greetings to the revolutionary Soviet government, the People's Commissars and the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets. It pledges to support them with all the forces and means available in the great struggle."

The elections to the All-Russia Constituent Assembly held late in November 1917 in accordance with the laws and lists of candidates approved while the Provisional government was still in power also showed which party received the most support

from the Lettish people. The candidates of the SDL won 72 per cent of the votes, whereas the Peasant League—the biggest bourgeois party—won only 23 per cent. In the Lettish riflemen's regiments 96.5 per cent of the officers and men gave their votes to the Bolsheviks.

The new bodies of power immediately proceeded to introduce radical economic and social changes.

The 2nd Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Landless Peasants' Deputies of Latvia was held in Valmiera on December 16-18 (29-31), 1917. Two hundred and fifty-three of the 297 delegates attending the Congress were members of the SDL. The resolution of the congress stated that "all power both in the centre and in the localities should entirely belong to the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Landless Peasants' Deputies".

The Congress of Deputies, the highest body of power, was to be convened at least twice a year. It elected the Soviet of Deputies to function between congresses. The Soviet in turn elected an Executive Committee (Iskolat) to implement the adopted decisions and decrees. The Presidium of the Iskolat and its departments were actually the first Soviet government of the autonomous Latvia. It was headed by Fricis Roziņš, one of the founders of the SDL.

In a manifesto "To All the Inhabitants of Latvia" the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Landless Peasants' Deputies announced the universal introduction of an eight-hour work day and state-funded disability, old age and unemployment insurance. The document pointed out: "The republic of the working people has no concern other than the welfare of every citizen..."

Self-Determination, Real and Fictitious

On November 2 (15), 1917 the Soviet government published the Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia, which emphasised the need for the immediate liberation of the oppressed peoples of Russia suffering under arbitrary rule. The Declaration stated that "liberation must be carried out decisively and irreversibly". The Soviet government pledged to replace the policy of oppression and deception with "an open and honest policy leading to complete mutual trust among the peoples of Russia".

The Soviet government proceeded from the following principles in dealing with the nationalities question:

1. Equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.

2. The right of the peoples of Russia to self-determination, including the right to secede and form an independent state.

3. Abolition of all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions.

4. Free development of national minorities and ethnic groups inhabiting the territory of Russia.

The position of the Latvian Social Democrats on this issue was determined way back at the beginning of the century. They believed that the development of the revolution in Latvia was inseparable from that in Russia. In the spring of 1917 the SDL was the first to raise the question of Latvia's self-determination, advancing the slogan: "A free Latvia in a free Russia". Its 5th Congress held in July 1917 passed a resolution "On the Question of Latvia's Self-Government (Political Autonomy)", which read in part:

"In the interests of Latvia's proletariat the congress firmly favours the establishment of a unified and indivisible Latvia (i.e., the unification of Vidzeme, Kurzeme and Latgale) and resolutely demands political autonomy for Latvia, i.e., complete local authority over economic, political and administrative spheres;

"The territorial boundaries of Latgale and the other bordering regions should be determined by the population of these regions;

"In the interests of democracy and, particularly, of the proletariat of Latvia it is vital to proceed immediately with work on a draft plan for Latvia's political autonomy and its realisation independent of the policies pursued by the central authority on the matter. This work should be accomplished by the Soviets of Workers, Soldiers and Landless Peasants of Latvia in agreement with the Central Committee of the SDL...

"The Social Democrats of Latvia demand that the question of Latvia's future and its international status be resolved by the people of Latvia; they will firmly and relentlessly fight against any attempt to decide Latvia's destiny in secret." (Resolution was passed by a vote of 77 for, and one against with seven abstentions.)

The bourgeoisie of Latvia had never proposed Latvian secession from Russia under the tsarist autocracy. However, the resolute support for Soviet power given by the majority of the Lettish people obviously aroused anxiety among the bourgeois

leaders who were trying to keep the reins of government in their hands at all costs. To this end, Jānis Goldmanis and Jānis Zālitis, former deputies to the State Duma, proposed in October 1917 the establishment of the so-called Lettish Provisional National Council.

Under the guise of promoting a "national cause" the bourgeoisie sought to question the lawfulness of the democratically elected bodies of power and to set the nationalities inhabiting Latvia against each other.

The Central Committee of the SDL passed a decision to boycott the bourgeois council. Published on October 3 (16), 1917 it stated "that no 'central Lettish bodies', except those that have been democratically elected by the entire population of Latvia, i.e., the bodies of self-government and the revolutionary democratic organisations (Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Landless Peasants' Deputies), can be recognised in any way; that the above call... is designed to split the revolutionary forces and to discredit them by opposing the democratic centres of united Latvia with a new, artificially created, fraud of national unification."

The decision of the Latvian Social Democrats, which was supported by the Vidzeme Zemstvo Council, enraged the bourgeoisie. On October 9 (22) the Peasant League faction announced its withdrawal from the regional zemstvo council, showing that the "national cause" was only intended to conceal the political question of who should hold power—the working people or the bourgeoisie.

The overthrow of the Provisional government further aggravated the state of confrontation. On November 17 (30), 1917 a Lettish Provisional National Council was set up at Valka and proclaimed united Latvia "an autonomous state entity" in its declaration. In later years, the falsifiers of history made the claim that the first time the demand for Latvia's national independence had been advanced was then in Valka. However, this claim holds no water. The declaration in fact mentioned national autonomy, whereas the revolutionary Lettish Social Democrats made this demand while Latvia was still under tsarist rule.

Late in 1917 and early 1918 the leaders of the Lettish Provisional National Council moved from Valka to Petrograd. On January 15-18 (28-31) they held another meeting, which passed overtly anti-Soviet decisions.

Failing to find support inside the country the bourgeois poli-

ticians sought outside aid. They established contacts with British and French diplomats in Petrograd. Francis O. Lindley, the British Commissioner in Russia, met with a representative of the National Council in Petrograd to supply him with 200,000 roubles for funding anti-Soviet activities. Joseph Noulens, the French Ambassador to Russia, gave another 100,000 roubles. Inspired by this support, the Lettish Provisional National Council sent Zigfrids Meierovics to London and Paris to plead for financial and moral aid for the creation of a bourgeois Latvia.

While the bourgeoisie was trying to decide the fate of Latvia behind the back of its people, Soviet power was taking concrete steps to implement the right to self-determination. Most important was the unification of Latvia.

On December 3-4 (16-17), 1917 an All-Latgale congress was held in Rēzekne, attended by representatives of all nationalities, and political and trade-union organisations. It elected the Latgale Soviet which decided to send delegates to the 2nd Congress of Soviets of Latvia. On December 18 (31), 1917 the Provisional Executive Committee of the Soviets of Latgale requested the Soviet government to incorporate the three Latgale districts of Vitebsk Gubernia into Latvia. In keeping with the principles laid down in the Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia, the Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Republic complied with this request.

Relying on the Kaiser's Bayonets

With no forces of its own to fight Soviet power the more reactionary circles of the Lettish bourgeoisie decided to turn to Germany for help. An assembly of bourgeois representatives headed by Andrejs Krastkalns, the former mayor of Riga, declared Latvia's secession from Russia on December 22, 1917 (January 3, 1918) and forwarded a petition asking Kaiser Wilhelm II to incorporate the country into Germany. The German delegation to the peace negotiations in Brest-Litovsk presented these documents to the Soviet Russian delegation as an argument in support of Germany's territorial claims.

This step of the imposters, however, evoked strong protest from the Lettish people.

The leaders of the SDL Central Committee, Iskolat, Iskolastrel and the Kurzeme Refugee Organisation presented a declaration of

the Lettish people at the peace conference at Brest-Litovsk, protesting against the Austro-German peace delegation's announcement concerning the alleged desire of the people of Kurzeme and Riga to secede from Russia. The declaration read in part:

"All Lettish parties without exception unanimously demand unity for the Lettish people and oppose their division... Self-determination of the Lettish nationality should be understood as the united will of the population of all these districts,* including the inhabitants who voluntarily left or were forced to leave their homeland owing to circumstances of the war.

"...Among the Lettish parties there is not a single one that formulated in its programme the aim of establishing Latvia's independence or seceding from Russia... Under military occupation free expression of will is, of course, out of the question."

The authors of the declaration demanded that "both German and Russian troops be withdrawn from Latvia so that the local inhabitants could freely determine their destiny... The Russian government is prepared to comply with the demand for the immediate withdrawal of troops..."

However, the question was not put to a vote. On February 18, 1918 Kaiser Germany and its allies broke off the peace talks at Brest-Litovsk, and the Austro-German forces assumed the offensive on all the battlefronts. By February 24 the entire territory of Vidzeme and Latgale was under German occupation. Thus Soviet power in Latvia was crushed by the Kaiser's troops.

The invaders immediately proceeded with the realisation of their plans for the annexation of the region. On March 8 the Kurland Landtag, made up of German landlords and reinforced by a few representatives of big Lettish farmers, declared itself a representative body of the province—the Kurland Zemstvo Council (Landestrat)—and voted for the formation of the Duchy of Kurland under the crown of the King of Prussia. On April 12 the so-called Combined Landestrat of Liflandia, Estland, Riga and Ezel was convened, which appealed to the German emperor with a petition requesting him "to afford military protection to Liflandia and Estland and to render support in tearing them away from Russia". The Landestrat favoured the formation of a constitutional monarchy—a Baltic Duchy—that through "the personal union

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* Reference was being made to Vidzeme, Riga, Kurzeme and Latgale.

with the King of Prussia would be incorporated into the German state".

Many of the Lettish bourgeois leaders who had only recently spoken about "an autonomous state" actively collaborated with the German invaders. The leaders of the so-called Democratic Bloc, made up of the Peasant League headed by Ulmanis and the Menshevik Social Democrats, were in principle loyal to the authorities.

In the Theatre, and in the Fight for Freedom on the Battlefield

A revolution in Germany in early November 1918 overthrew the Kaiser regime and forced the plans for the annexation of Latvia to be abandoned. On November 13 Moscow annulled the Brest Peace Treaty, rendering all the commitments concerning territorial concessions invalid. This paved the way for the liberation of German occupied territories, including Latvia, and for the free expression of the will of the peoples with respect to their political and state structure.

But the forces of internal and foreign counter-revolution had different aims. On November 11 an armistice was signed at Compiègne, compelling the German forces to withdraw from the territories they had seized. The Western Allies, however, introduced a special clause in the agreement obliging Germany to continue to occupy territories in the East until the Entente governments considered that the political situation there was ripe for their withdrawal.

In Latvia the German occupation command and the Soldiers' Council of the 8th Army, which emerged as a result of the revolution in Germany, did not prevent the local bourgeoisie from setting up "a national government". The leaders of the Lettish Provisional National Council and those of the Democratic Bloc plunged into a fierce struggle for power, resulting in the establishment of the Provisional People's Council of Latvia on November 17. The Democratic Bloc having prevailed, Jānis Čakste, a lawyer and former member of the State Duma, was elected president of the People's Council and Kārlis Ulmanis, the head of the provisional government.

On November 18, 1918 the bourgeois Latvian Republic was officially proclaimed at the Lettish national theatre in Riga.

The occupation troops calmly watched all this fuss. Soothing the fears of the German barons, Hoessler, the governor of Riga, told them, "This is just a theatre show. It may look like a Lettish ceremony, but it does not threaten anybody."

Indeed, the only force the invaders, the local German barons and bourgeoisie had to be worried about was the Soviets.

On November 13, 1918 a meeting of the working people in Valka formed an organisational committee for elections to the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, which was elected and began functioning a few days later. A Soviet of Workers' Deputies was set up in Liepāja and in Vec Gulbene on November 14 and 15 respectively. On November 17 a meeting of 5,000 workers in Riga passed a resolution on the restoration of Soviet power, and on

The Red Lettish Riflemen began to liberate Latvia from the German invaders soon after the government of the Russian Federation denounced the oppressive Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty.

On December 4, 1918 the Central Committee of the SDL and representatives of the Riga and Valka Soviets of Workers' Deputies adopted a decision on the immediate establishment of a Provisional Soviet Government of Latvia.

In the photo: *Sarkanajs Karogs*, a newspaper published by the Valka Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

Wiſu ſemju proletareeſchi, ſaſweenojatees!

Sarkanais Karogs.

Numurs maksā 20 ſen.

Walkas Strahdneeku Padomes laikraksts.

Nr. 1. Pee Walkas, 22. novembrī 1918. g.

Lai dſihwo revoluzija!
Lai dſihwo Strahdneeku Deputatu Padomes!

Strahdneekeem.

November 19 an organisational committee for elections to the Soviet of Workers' Deputies started to work in Riga.

The SDL's 17th Conference was illegally held in Riga on November 18-19, at which the economic and political situation in Latvia was discussed, along with the tasks facing the party as a result of the changes in the country's position. The Conference, having made its analysis, set, among others, the following task:

"To draw broad masses of workers into active struggle, to re-establish the Soviets of Workers' and Landless Peasants' Deputies with the help of revolutionary methods."

The struggle of the working people against the bourgeois People's Council was becoming increasingly acute. A workers' rally in Riga on November 24 adopted a protest resolution that read in part:

"The working class of Latvia will not allow itself to be sold. We want our workers' Soviet to replace the People's Council of the propertied classes. The Soviet of Workers' Deputies of Latvia alone has the right to decide the destiny of Latvia."

On November 25, as part of the attempts of the occupation authorities to suppress the actions of the Lettish working people, the German police prevented the Riga Soviet of Workers' Deputies from holding its meeting. When the Soviet convened on December 1, the police forcefully interrupted it and arrested some of the deputies, including the Soviet's chairman, Rúdolfs Endrups. Despite this, the Soviet continued to function underground and to exercise leadership over the struggle against the bourgeois regime.

Even the foreign sponsors of the bourgeois People's Council realised that it was bankrupt. August Winnig, the German General Commissioner for the Baltic countries, later recalled:

"The base of the Ulmanis government was too narrow. Therefore, he could not really rely on it. The People's Council was entirely formed by the party bosses. Nobody cared about what the people themselves wanted. They divided the power without any regard for the people's will."

But this did not stop Winnig from signing a temporary agreement on December 1, 1918 on the transfer of authority to the Ulmanis government as the German troops were being gradually withdrawn. To back it up, Winnig and the command of the 8th German Army began forming the so-called "Iron Brigade" from reactionary elements serving in the German army who were prepared to fight for Germany's imperial interests in the Baltic

countries. A treaty was signed on December 7 creating a Landeswehr in Latvia consisting of 18 Lettish companies and three batteries, seven German companies and two batteries, and a Russian company. It soon became obvious, however, that it would not be possible to form Lettish companies. The government could pin its hopes only on the Germans.

The Entente, to prop up the bourgeois regimes in the Baltic countries, sent a British naval squadron, which arrived at Liepāja on November 30, 1918. On December 17 several British ships entered the port of Riga.

Fighting for the Power of the Working People

As soon as the Brest Peace Treaty was annulled the SDL set itself the task of restoring Soviet power in the country and proclaiming it a sovereign Soviet Republic.

On December 4, 1918 the SDL Central Committee decided to form a government in Riga headed by Peteris Stučka. The government counted on liberating the country with the help of its internal forces—an uprising of the proletariat supported by the Lettish riflemen's regiments. It did not appeal to Soviet Russia for military aid, only for "moral and material support". The Communists of Latvia did not need any outside military support in order to restore Soviet power.

On December 16, 1918 an uprising broke out in Valka and power went over into the hands of the local Soviet. The German "Iron Brigade" tried to disperse the Soviet and subjected its members to reprisals. But the Lettish riflemen's regiments came to their aid, and on December 17 Soviet power was again restored in Valka.

On that day a Manifesto of the Latvian Soviet government was published. It read in part:

"From now on all state power in Latvia shall once again be in the hands of the Soviet government.

"We declare deposed all provisional governments, zemstvo and people's councils, as well as their ministries, which, under the auspices of one group of imperialists or another, have sought to enslave the working people of Latvia. We have rescinded all laws, orders and establishments forced on the working people of Latvia

Peteris Stučka, head of Latvia's first Soviet government.

by the German feudal lords, tsarist autocracy, German imperialism and the Russian bourgeoisie."

The Manifesto set forth the government's programme based on the decisions of the 2nd Congress of Soviets of Latvia held in Valmiera in December 1917:

"Private ownership of land and farm implements shall be abolished. All land belonging to the landlords, government and the Church, together with the farm implements, shall immediately and without any redemption be placed under the authority of the Soviets.

"Private ownership of the other means of production, of trade enterprises, transportation, banks, etc., shall gradually be abolished. To this end they shall forthwith be placed under strict workers' control...

"An eight-hour work day shall immediately be introduced... All the decrees of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic on providing for the working class shall come into force.

"Speculation shall be relentlessly combatted. All available food supplies shall be transferred for subsequent distribution to the Soviet bodies of authority. The provision of foodstuffs in short supply shall be immediately organised.

"The industrial enterprises that have been destroyed or

evacuated should be rehabilitated as quickly as possible. All work essential for communist Latvia should be duly carried out.

"We are fully aware that the transition to socialism cannot take place in one day. But we are resolutely embarking on the road to socialism... We know that we are not alone on this difficult road and in this arduous struggle. We are backed by **the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, with which we shall be closely connected through more than external ties.**"

On December 22, 1918 Vladimir Lenin, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR, signed a decree recognising the independence of the Soviet Republic of Latvia. All military and civilian authorities of the Russian Soviet Republic contacting Latvia were obliged "to render the Soviet government of Latvia and its forces all possible assistance in the fight for the liberation of Latvia from the yoke of the bourgeoisie".

And, indeed, such assistance was needed. A telegram dated December 21, 1918 to Vladimir Lenin and Yakov Sverdlov* from the Soviet government of Latvia read in part:

"The White Guard forces are destroying and burning everything they can as they retreat. The population is left without bread. The need for it is acute. On behalf of the Soviet government of Latvia, we appeal to you, representatives of fraternal Russia, to send to the population of Latvia's liberated towns as quickly as possible 20 trainloads of grain, as much soap as you can spare and tobacco."

Though Soviet Russia was extremely short of food at the time, it rendered the Lettish working people all possible assistance. In December 1918 the government of the Russian Federation granted Soviet Latvia a loan of 20 million roubles, and in February 1919 dozens of trains carrying food, fabrics, kerosene and other goods arrived in Riga. Trainloads of grain, sugar and butter were also sent to Latvia by Soviet Ukraine.

In this connection, it is appropriate to recall the commitment assumed by the bourgeois government of Latvia when it signed the treaty with Germany on the transfer of authority "to provide the German troops with meat, butter, cheese, eggs, potatoes,

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* Yakov Sverdlov (1885-1919), Soviet statesman and Party leader. On November 8, 1917 he became Chairman of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee.

oats, hay, straw and, inasmuch as it is possible, fish, while they are in the Lettish part of Vidzeme, Kurzeme and Latgale".

When British ships drew into the Riga harbour on December 17 the press bureau of the Provisional government reported:

"A subdivision of the British Navy will be permanently stationed in the harbour. In addition, the British government is supplying the Provisional government of Latvia with arms and all other essential munitions for the organisation of the Latvian army. It has undertaken the commitment to support the independence of the Latvian state and its fight against the Bolsheviks."

But even foreign aid could not help the bourgeois government. Units of the Lettish riflemen's regiments took over Valmiera and Cēsis. At the end of 1918 they defeated the German "Iron Brigade" at Sigulda and Ineukalns. The Central Military Revolutionary Committee of Latvia was preparing for an uprising in Riga.

In despair the Provisional government declared the mobilisation of men into its army. But on the night of December 29, two of the five companies formed in Riga rebelled, and the bourgeois government appealed to the British for help. The naval squadron opened fire, forcing the rebels to surrender. Eleven men were shot.

Seeing that the Letts were unwilling to fight for the interests of the capitalist class, the Provisional government decided to replace them with mercenaries. On December 29 it signed an agreement with the German General Commissioner that granted Latvian citizenship "to all persons serving in foreign armies (who shall request it), provided they have fought with the volunteer corps for the liberation of Latvia from the Bolsheviks for at least four weeks".

But this was still not enough. On January 2, 1919 an uprising broke out in Riga, and by the evening of the following day a large part of the city was in the hands of the workers. Units of the Lettish riflemen's regiments arrived in time to consolidate the victory of the rebels. During the first two weeks in January, there were successful uprisings of workers and landless peasants that gave power to the local Soviets in Jelgava, Bauska, Dobele, Saldus, Talsi and Ventspils. These uprisings marked the triumph of Soviet power in the country. The Lettish riflemen's regiments were only needed to consolidate these victories. The Ulmanis government fled from Riga to Jelgava and then took refuge in

Liepāja, where it was protected by foreign bayonets and the guns of the British naval squadron.

Soviet Republic

On January 13-15, 1919 a Congress of Soviets of Workers', Landless Peasants' and Riflemen's Deputies of reunited Latvia was held in Riga. It was attended by 705 delegates from all parts of the Republic, including Liepāja and the rural districts of Kurzeme where Soviet power had not yet been established. The congress heard and approved the report on the work of the Soviet government and adopted the first Constitution of the Soviet Republic of Latvia.

The reunited Latvia, comprising Vidzeme, Kurzeme and Latgale, was proclaimed a Soviet Socialist Republic. The highest body of state authority was the Congress of Soviets of Workers' Deputies. The Soviet government, which was elected by the Central Executive Committee (elected by the Congress) from among its members, was accountable to the congress. The members of the Central Executive Committee drew no salary other than that paid to them at their work place. Local power was vested in the regional and district Soviets. All men and women who had reached the age of 18 had the right to vote, with the exception of persons who were living on unearned incomes and those who had been deprived of this right by sentence of the court or some other body of revolutionary authority.

The Congress of Soviets also adopted a resolution with respect to Russia, which instructed the Soviet government of Latvia "to work out the main principles governing the relations between the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic and Latvia proceeding from the unanimous desire of the working people of Latvia to live with Soviet Russia in a close fraternal union and to continue the struggle against the foreign interventionists, for the victory of the working people".

The Soviet government of Latvia immediately started to carry out a whole range of social, economic and political reforms. It quickly moved to nationalise the main industries, carry out changes in the countryside, introduce an eight-hour work day and issue decrees on social insurance and security for the working people. It did much to overcome the famine and began rehabilitating the national economy.

"A Soap Bubble Between Millstones"

By the beginning of 1919 it looked as though the days of the bourgeois government were numbered. The defeated units of the German "Iron Brigade" and Landeswehr had retreated to Liepāja to share refuge there with the bourgeois government. In February, however, reinforcements started to arrive from Germany, and soon the "Iron Brigade" became an "Iron Division", forming a component of the German reserve corps headed by General von der Goltz.

The general assumed full powers in Liepāja and the adjacent area. For a long time the Ulmanis government had practically no forces. By March 30, 1919, Ulmanis, with some difficulty, had succeeded in recruiting 1,400 men into his army. In later years, General von der Goltz, speaking about the Ulmanis government, recalled:

"The fewer supporters it had among the people, the more it had to rely on force to retain power, although it was backed by German bayonets and the Entente."

To consolidate its power, the government started to form armed detachments of *aisargi* (defenders) from the more reactionary sections of the population, who subjected the working people to a campaign of terror.

Western representatives in Latvia, however, questioned the bourgeoisie's ability to retain power there. The head of the American mission to the Baltic Provinces, Lieutenant Colonel Warwick Greene, for example, reported the following to his superiors from Liepāja on April 12, 1919:

"... The present situation in Latvia is more critical than in other territories we are to cover...

"Foodstuffs are scarce with high prices and diminishing stocks... From a reliable source I understand that current feeling among unemployed and landless is that if they must starve they prefer to do so under Bolshevist regime...

"Germans dominate situation as they are here in force and Lettish Army is insignificant as military factor... Without Germans the country would be quickly submerged by Bolsheviki...

"The present *de facto* government of Latvia is extremely weak, and represents no mandate from the people of Latvia. It would be overthrown immediately if there were popular election."

Meanwhile General von der Goltz, having consolidated his

positions in Kurzeme, decided to take over the political administration. On April 16 the Landeswehr units engineered a coup in Liepāja to install a pro-German cabinet under the Rev. Andrievs Niedra. Kārlis Ulmanis and his ministers were forced to seek safety aboard the steamship *Saratov* protected by British warships.

The aid granted by the Entente and the arrival of reinforcements from Germany enabled the latter to take over Kurzeme during March and April. The Landeswehr broke through the front and reached Riga on May 22. The last defenders of the city withdrew over the bridges at Lake Jugla in the early hours of May 23.

When the Germans took over the Latvian capital, they enforced a state of siege. In the course of two or three weeks, several thousand people were put to death without investigation or trial. In June the German forces launched an offensive on Vidzeme. But the attacking units of the Landeswehr became embroiled in a conflict with the troops of the Estonian and Latvian bourgeois governments, which could not be settled even by the heads of the military missions of the Entente countries. Having lost in battles fought south of Valmiera on June 19-23, 1919, the Germans were forced to agree to an armistice arranged by the allied missions in order to avoid total defeat. The Landeswehr and the "Iron Division" withdrew to Kurzeme.

The Niedra regime was deposed by the Entente representatives, who reinstated the government of Kārlis Ulmanis. It arrived at Riga on July 8, 1919 aboard the same steamship *Saratov*. The Western powers insisted that the reinstated government include the representatives of the German barons and the urban bourgeoisie.

The shameless foreign interference in the internal affairs of the Lettish people quite clearly showed that the authors of the declaration on Latvia's self-determination—the Central Committee of the SDL and the Iskolat—were right. Issued way back in December 1917, the declaration read in part:

"The political independence of such a small state surrounded by imperialist powers is but a mere illusion. Confronted with political reality it will inevitably burst like a soap bubble between millstones."

A Difficult Peace

Moscow made a realistic appraisal of the situation that had taken shape in Latvia. Soviet Russia did not have the forces with

which to render aid to Soviet Latvia.* At the same time, it was eager to break the ring of intervention at at least one point.

On September 11, 1919 Georgi Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, sent this telegram to Riga:

"It (the government of Soviet Russia) has no aggressive intentions with respect to the newly-formed states in the borderlands of the former Russian Empire. Maintaining the same stand with respect to the Riga government, the government of Soviet Russia proposes to open negotiations on the cessation of hostilities and the elaboration of the terms for peaceful relations between both sides."

But the possibility of such developments was not to the liking of the Entente countries. Acting on instructions from London, the British Commissioner for the Baltic Provinces, Lt. Col. S. G. Tallent, presented a note to the Latvian Foreign Minister on September 22, 1919, which said that the British government demands that the Latvian government take no measures towards the making of peace... and included threats of the discontinuance of further aid.

The Ulmanis government was only too willing to oblige. The same day the note was presented the government expressed its "readiness to carry on the struggle against the Bolsheviks".

In October 1919 a military conflict flared up between the bourgeois Provisional government of Latvia and the army under Prince Pavel Bermondt-Avalov, a stooge of German imperialism in the Baltic countries. He attempted to take Riga and then the whole of Vidzeme. The Ulmanis government appealed to the population to resist the attack. Faced with the threat of the return of the German barons to Latvia, the population responded to the government's call, and, with the assistance of the naval squadron of the Entente, the army of the bourgeois government defeated that of Bermondt-Avalov at Riga.

Early in January 1920 the Latvian bourgeois army launched a large-scale offensive in Latgale. The White Poles took Daugavpils. Soon Rēzekne and Ludza fell too. With the units of the Lettish riflemen's regiments fighting on the Southern Front, the Latvian bourgeois army managed to take the whole of Latgale.

On January 13, 1920 the Soviet government of Latvia ap-

* After the fall of Riga, Soviet Latvia included only Latgale, the eastern part of the republic. Here Soviet power existed until the beginning of 1920, when it was crushed by counter-revolutionary forces and interventionists.

pealed to the working people of the Republic. Though stating that superior interventionist forces had succeeded in ousting Soviet power from the heart of Latvia, it was made clear that "the Communist Party in the centre (in Kurzeme and Vidzeme), though driven underground, has further grown. It is now effecting guidance of the working people's political life".

In view of the new conditions the Soviet government of Latvia transferred all power and authority to the underground Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia.

Though the Communists had switched over to underground forms of work, this did not mean that the class struggle had ceased in Latvia. The bourgeois government even feared its own army. Colonel Jānis Balodis, the commander-in-chief, was forced to admit on January 23, 1920:

"Even privates have been observed openly promoting Bolshevist ideas. It is a pity, but neither the officers nor the men travelling with the propagandists in the same railway car arrest them. They calmly listen to what the disseminators of Bolshevist ideas have to say."

On February 6 the newspaper *Cinas Balss* wrote:

"Two Lettish companies mutinied in Liepāja. The uprising was caused by the court martialling of five privates and a lieutenant. The companies in question demanded that Soviets be set up. They were disarmed and sent to Riga... The ammunition was taken away from the men because the officers feared them. It is openly said among the men that the old order has been restored in the Latvian army."

Because of such developments, the bourgeois government was forced finally to accept the Soviet peace proposals, resulting in an armistice agreement being signed on January 30, 1920 and the signing of a peace treaty in Riga on August 11.

Georgi Chicherin, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, later recalled:

"We had to reckon with the fact that bourgeois national republics had finally taken shape on our borders. And Vladimir Ilyich Lenin firmly and clearly advanced a policy of peace and friendly relations with our neighbours."

On May 16, 1921 Chicherin briefed Y. Ganetski, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to Latvia, as follows:

"In the Baltic states the policy of the Soviet government is to strengthen the present mutually advantageous friendly relations and economic ties with these states."

THE PRICE OF INDEPENDENCE

Soviet Russia was the first state to officially recognise the independence of bourgeois Latvia. The Western powers were in no hurry to do so. As far as they were concerned the Baltic countries were merely a convenient base for future intervention in Soviet Russia.

The Riga bourgeois government went out of its way to curry favour with its Western patrons. In a government declaration dated June 16, 1920, Kārlis Ulmanis stated that "the ideological affinity and reciprocal interests" of Latvia and the Western powers formed the "unshakable foundation" of his government's foreign policy. In the fight between the West and the East, Latvia would "firmly align itself to the policies of Western Europe and America". To arouse their interest, the bourgeois government was prepared to sell out its country. This was outspokenly declared in an aide-mémoire drawn up by the Latvian Foreign Ministry. It read in part:

"The sympathies of the great allied powers and their readiness to aid us will largely depend on the size of their investments in our country and on their economic interest in our welfare and security."

The regime acquired the external attributes of democracy. The Sejm was elected every three years, and the government was accountable to it. The constitution formally proclaimed democratic freedoms. But at the same time the party that had won from 50 to 75 per cent of the votes in all the democratically conducted elections in 1917, that is, the party of

Lettish Communists, was deprived of all rights; its members were persecuted. From 1920 to 1922, the bourgeois court sentenced to death by firing squad Augusts Arājs-Bērce and Jānis Šilfs-Jaunzems, prominent members of the Communist Party of Latvia, P. Alksnis and F. Bergmanis, leaders of Communist Party organisations in the Latvian army, and many others. The representatives of the revolutionary proletariat were not permitted to take part in the elections to the First and Second Sejms. On the eve of the 1922 elections the police arrested 800 left-wing trade-union activists.

On January 26, 1921 the High Council of the Entente countries decided to officially recognise Latvia and Estonia. But Washington still hesitated to do so. In a note, dated September 2, 1920, to the Italian Ambassador to the USA, Bainbridge Colby, US Secretary of State, expressed his confidence that Soviet power would soon collapse in Russia. Therefore, he said that the USA believed that all decisions that could have important consequences for Russia should be postponed pending this development. It was only on July 28, 1922 that the US government finally gave official recognition to Latvia. The Latvian Encyclopedia published by the Lettish bourgeois emigres in Sweden said that the US made this step, even though it was sure that the Baltic "filial" states would one day return to the lap of their "mother". But when Latvia did join the Soviet Union in 1940, Washington refused to recognise the will of the Lettish people.

"A Piece of Butter and Bacon in the Greedy Hands of the Imperialists"

This was how Jānis Sudrabkalns, a poet of the Lettish people, referred to bourgeois Latvia. The falsifiers of history try to portray the period from 1920 to 1940 in Latvia in idealised terms. They say that democracy flourished then and that there was no class struggle. They also colour the economic conditions and the living standards of the people.

Though bourgeois Latvia did achieve some success in economic development, it was unsteady. The agrarian reform strengthened the economic positions of the rich farmers and a section of the middle farmers. Many million lats' worth of butter, bacon and timber were exported. The living standard of a section of the

population was rather high. But there were other indisputable facts as well.

Latvia was gripped by an economic crisis as soon as it became independent. Actually, the government sought to reorientate the economy towards the West. This policy disrupted historically formed economic ties, especially in industry. In 1913, seventy-four per cent of Latvia's industrial output was channeled into Russia. Alfrēds Bilmanis, a leader of bourgeois Latvia, admitted:

"The state of affairs changed sharply. The national economies of the Baltic countries as well as those of Finland and Poland were separated from that of Russia. It should be mentioned that the combined economy of the Baltic zone, which had been ravaged and weakened by the war, was further split up into three individual national economies, namely, those of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The favourable conditions for the Baltic industries, shipping and trade had also changed."

Reorientation of farming towards Western markets made it necessary to change its structure. It became concentrated on dairy products and bacon. The wealthy farmers, who turned out these products, received considerable export subsidies, while a section of the middle and small farmers plunged deeper and deeper into debt.

The right-wing Social Democrats skillfully took advantage of the people's gravitation towards socialist ideas. They invariably enjoyed a lead in the elections. The real power, however, was in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The leaders of the Peasant League, who took second place in the elections, headed virtually all of the ministries.

In January 1927 the fascists engineered an abortive putsch in Latvia. A powerful wave of popular activity swept the country. It soon became evident that the ruling circles feared the working people far more than the fascists. In the summer of 1928 a number of left-wing working-class organisations was banned. The worker-peasant faction formed in the Sejm in 1928 was being subjected to constant attacks.

On October 24, 1929 the New York Stock Exchange experienced a sharp drop in stock prices—the first indication of the crisis that was about to strike the whole of the capitalist world. From 1929 to 1933 Latvia's exports of manufactured goods dropped by 80 per cent and the turnover of the banks decreased by 70 per cent. According to official figures for 1932, unemployment stood at 43,500. The workers' wages were slashed 23 to 29

per cent and those of farm labourers—more than 32 per cent. The total debt of the middle and small farmers, who made up the overwhelming majority, rocketed from 189,800,000 lats in 1929 to 268,200,000 lats in 1932.

The economic crisis further intensified the social struggle. In the elections to the Fourth Sejm held in October 1931 the Social Democrats and the Peasant League suffered considerable losses. The worker-peasant list of candidates secured 70,000 votes. However, as early as November 1933 the government of A. Blodnieks eliminated the worker-peasant faction in the Sejm. Many of the deputies were arrested and given long terms of imprisonment.

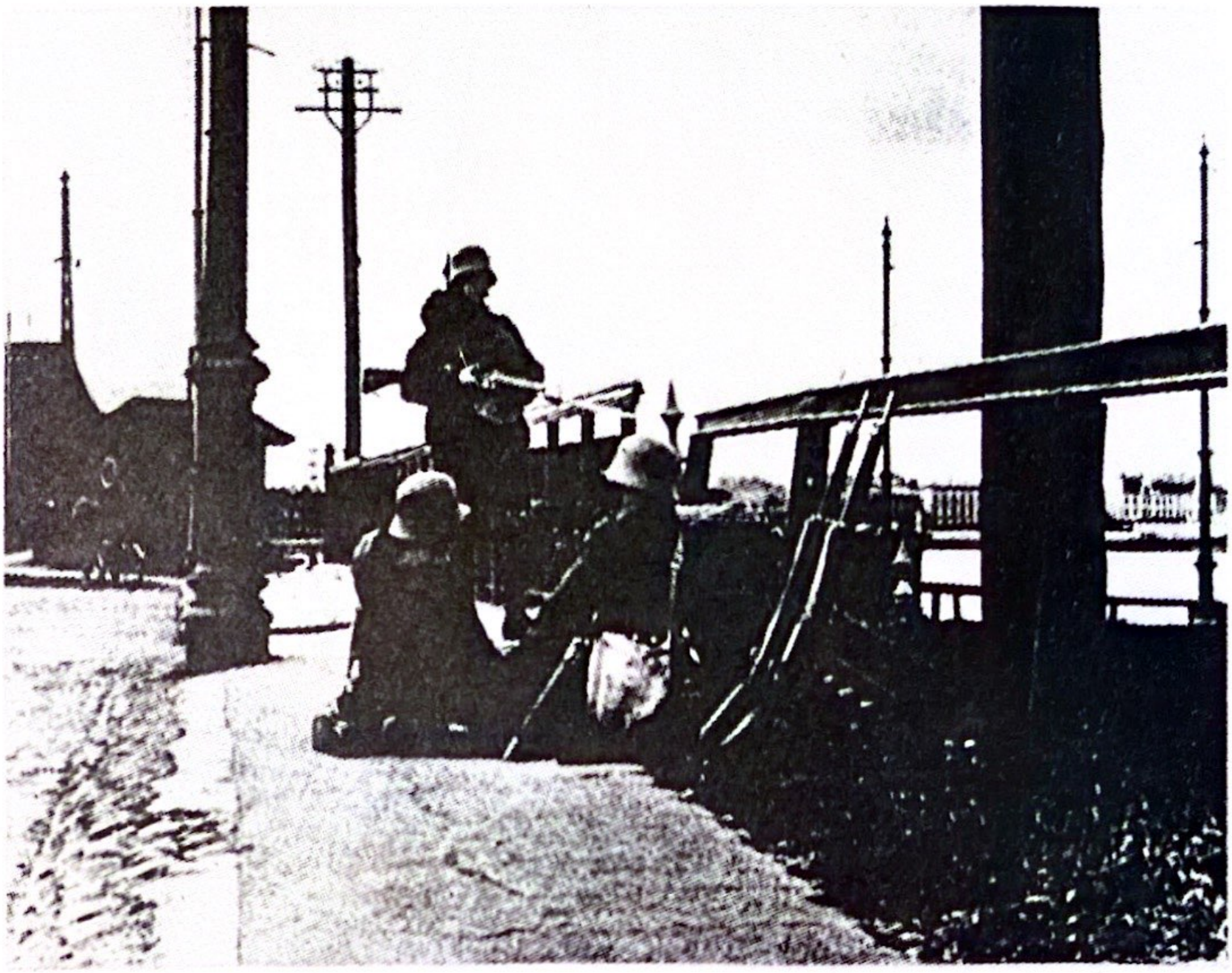
In its foreign policy, Latvia was oriented towards Great Britain in the 1920s. Gradually, however, Germany began to play an increasingly important role in the republic's economy. By the late 1920s, it had already become Latvia's leading foreign trade partner and German capital held first place among foreign investors. The strengthening of Germany's economic positions paved the way for Berlin's political influence.

The USSR did its best to maintain and strengthen good-neighbourly relations with Latvia. The disarmament conference held in Moscow in December 1922 was a clear expression of its peaceful intentions. But because of Western obstruction the conference produced no practical results. In 1925 the Soviet government suggested that non-aggression pacts be signed between the USSR and the neighbouring countries. The Latvian government initialled the Soviet-Latvian treaty on March 9, 1927, but, because anti-Soviet sentiment prevailed in Riga, would not go any further.

The Soviet government, in connection with the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact renouncing war as an instrument of national policy, proposed that it be put into effect before the date originally set. The Moscow Protocol approving it was signed by the Soviet Union, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Romania on February 9, 1929.

At the same time the USSR sought to cement its ties with Latvia in other fields as well. On June 2, 1927 the two countries signed a trade agreement to expand economic contacts. Its true value to Latvia was revealed during the economic crisis, when Soviet orders provided more than 20,000 jobs.

Such developments as these, however, ran counter to the interests of Latvia's Western patrons. Yielding to pressure from



As soon as the fascist coup took place in Latvia martial law was introduced in the country.
In the photo: A sentry at a post on the bridge across the Daugava River in Riga.

London, the Latvian government went against the interests of its own people by curtailing trade with the Soviet Union. In 1932 it refused to prolong the agreement. As a result, the volume of Soviet-Latvian trade shrank from 40.1 million lats in 1929 to 14.2 million in 1932 and to a mere 1.2 million in 1933.

The Fascist Drive

Hitler's takeover of power in Germany in January 1933 and the expansionist course of the Nazis made the question of creating a system of collective security in Europe most urgent. It was the Soviet Union that called for the creation of such a system. On February 5, 1932 a Soviet-Latvian non-aggression pact was signed, which, together with other similar pacts, was to form a foundation for a reliable system preventing the outbreak of war.

As the subsequent developments showed, these were timely steps.

Riga realised what the Germans were after. Way back in November 1932, the Latvian Mission to Berlin reported that conservative German circles "were not reconciled with the independence of the new states" and that Hitler was eager to "extend German domination to the east".

That was why Latvia responded to the new Soviet initiatives designed to strengthen European security and to guarantee the independence of the Baltic states. In a February 28, 1934 letter sent to its diplomatic representatives in other countries, the Latvian foreign ministry wrote that "under the present circumstances" the Soviet Union was "the main factor for the maintenance of peace in Eastern Europe".

On April 4, 1934 a protocol prolonging the non-aggression pacts between the USSR and the Baltic states for a period of 10 years was signed in Moscow.

But the danger of fascism came from internal as well as the external sources. The Peasant League, the leading party of the Lettish nationalist bourgeoisie headed by Ulmanis, had long been striving to establish "a strong government". Despite the long-standing proposal of the Lettish Communists to form an urgently needed united workers' front, the Social Democrats turned a deaf ear.

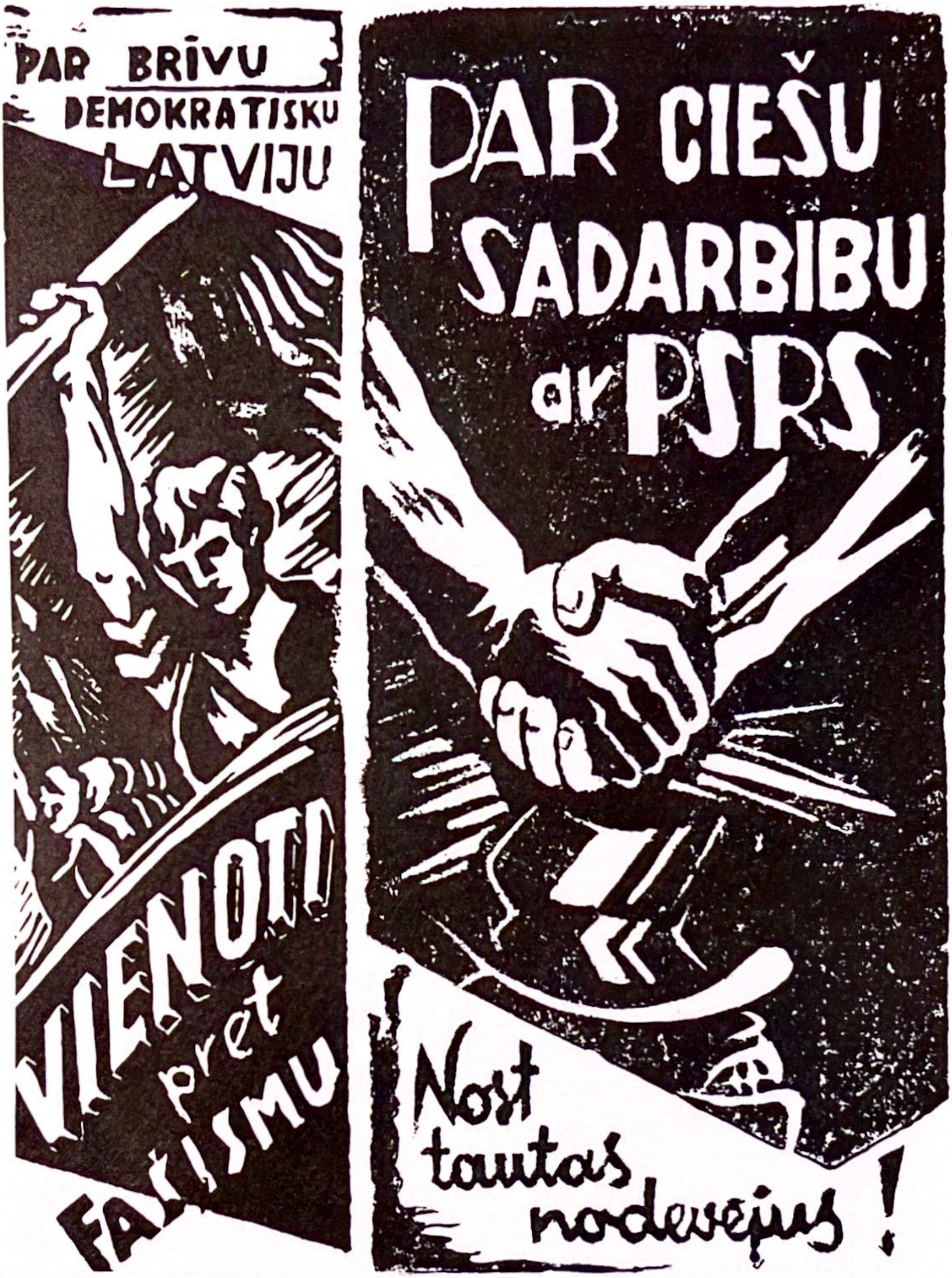
On the night of May 15, 1934 a group headed by Ulmanis, with the help of the *aisargi* and the reactionary top brass of the army, launched a fascist coup. Issuing a demagogic slogan about the "liberation of Latvia from the yoke of parties", the parliamentary regime was abolished. The Sejm was dissolved and political parties were banned. In May and June, 2,000 people were subjected to repressions. A fascist regime was then installed.

GATHERING STORM OF WAR OVER THE BALTIC

Having seized power Ulmanis promised to pursue a policy of "invigoration" in order "to meet the interests of all classes". His talk about "national regeneration" and "national unity" served to strengthen the role of the reactionary forces in the republic's politics. The democratic system of government was overthrown. Big capital fortified its positions. Even the limited democratic freedoms which existed earlier were abolished by the coup.

In 1938 Latvia's industrial output reached the 1913 level. However, the economic growth was accompanied by a decline in the working people's living standards. For instance, in 1934-1939 the subsistence level showed an increase of 34.8 per cent in Riga, though there was no major increase in wages. In 1935-1939 alone 3,230 farms came under the hammer for being unable to pay their debts. Seventy-five thousand poor peasant households, or one of every three farms, had barely enough land. The 160,000 farm labourers were in an even worse plight. In 1939 *Ciņa* described their life as follows:

"Their working day begins at dawn, at three thirty in the morning, and ends when darkness sets in. The labourers have only six hours for rest. Food is very poor. The kulaks (rich peasants) never give their labourers meat. They give butter, but very little, and then only on Sundays and holidays. The kulaks treat their labourers like chattel. Wages add up to a few pennies. In order not to die of hunger, the farm labourers have to work at timber mills in spring."



The Communists refused to submit to the fascist dictatorship in Latvia. A United Workers' Front was set up underground. Placards were being illegally printed. The slogans were: "For a free and democratic Latvia", "Form a united front to fight fascism", and "We are for close cooperation with the USSR".

The fascist coup in 1934 took the Social-Democratic Party unawares. Politically it was bankrupt. Some of the left-wing activists drew the right conclusions from the bitter experience of history. They set up an underground party, the Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party of Latvia, which supported the Communists' call to create a united workers' front. In November 1934 the Communists and the Socialists signed an agreement on "combining their forces for the struggle".

More and more groups were joining the united front. In June 1934 the Young Socialist League of Latvia was founded. Two years later it merged with the Young Communist League to form the Young Workers' League of Latvia. Soon the underground Association of Revolutionary Writers, Journalists and Artists adopted the united front platform.

In May 1936 a Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia passed a resolution on the organisation of a united workers' and anti-fascist front. The Communists pointed out that "only by drawing into the fight against fascism broad sections of working peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, and the working people of the national minorities, only by organising a broad anti-fascist people's front will the proletariat be able to inflict a final defeat on fascist despotism backed by a handful of rich men and parasites whom the people hate".

German Pressure Mounting

In putting forward peaceful initiatives in those days, the Soviet government hoped that the ruling circles of Latvia would eventually display a sense of responsibility for national well-being. That was why the USSR supported the proposal made by the French Foreign Minister Jean Louis Barthou on the conclusion of an Eastern Pact for regional mutual assistance in Eastern Europe.

On July 29, 1934 the Latvian envoy in Moscow Alfrēds Bilmanis said to Maxim Litvinov, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR:

"The Latvian government declares that it is in favour of the conclusion of an Eastern Pact for regional mutual assistance, with the USSR, Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic states participating in it."

Germany and the Western powers, however, prevented the conclusion of such a pact. On July 15, 1935 the Latvian envoy in

Berlin was summoned to the German Foreign Ministry and informed that Germany "would not approve" of Latvia joining the Soviet-French system of collective security. The British government, for its part, notified Riga that it "did not like" to see Latvia conclude a pact with the USSR.

The majority of the Letts had no doubt which side they would take in the event of a war between Germany and the USSR, in which Latvia would inevitably be drawn. And not only the people, but even some of the high-ranking officials of the regime expressed themselves in favour of a rapprochement with the Soviet Union. The Soviet minister plenipotentiary in Riga reported that the Latvian army showed "a hostile attitude towards Germany and a desire, in the event of war, to fight against Germany together with us". General Jānis Balodis, the Latvian War Minister, confirmed this in a talk he had with the Soviet minister plenipotentiary on October 28, 1938. He said:

"The indigenous Letts, particularly those in the army, have never been drawn towards Poland or Germany and never will be... The Lettish people will never take their side, and we know this only too well. If you want to know, as you obviously do, our people have cordial feelings only for you, Russians. And we must reckon with this."

In the face of the mounting German threat and pressure Latvia could have secured reliable support in opposing possible aggression against it by entering into cooperation with the Soviet Union. The Latvian Foreign Minister, Vilhelms Munters, was able to see this for himself once again when he arrived on an official visit to Moscow in June 1937. In their talks with him Josef Stalin, Maxim Litvinov and other Soviet statesmen reaffirmed the USSR's desire to preserve the independence and territorial integrity of the Baltic countries. Maxim Litvinov, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, said:

"Today it is an axiom that the security of individual states cannot be guaranteed unless universal security is ensured. Therefore, the states have to think not only about their own frontiers, but also about ensuring the non-violation of other states' frontiers. In any case, the geographical position of the Latvian Republic is such that the USSR cannot but show a special interest in the complete preservation of its integrity and independence in keeping with the Covenant of the League of Nations."

The leaders of the regime, of course, feared the German threat. However, they feared even more the development of friendly

relations with the Soviet Union, which would increase the popularity of socialist ideas among their own people. So they chose what they regarded as the lesser evil. These calculations were only one step away from the betrayal of Latvia's national interests.

On the Threshold of War

In March 1938 the German troops occupied Austria. The USSR strongly condemned this act of aggression. It declared its readiness "to participate in any collective actions based on joint decisions to stop the further development of aggression and to remove the danger of another worldwide massacre".

The Western powers, however, refused to support the Soviet initiative. It was becoming increasingly evident that Latvia was pursuing a course of curtailing relations with the USSR. It had opted for a policy of "neutrality" which actually amounted to complicity with Berlin.

Later Vilhelms Munters recalled that public opinion in the small European countries, including Latvia, "was obviously hostile to the aggressor. But the leaders of these states took care not to condemn outright this expansionist policy and kept silent..." This attitude was reflected in Latvia's foreign trade. Latvian exports to Germany increased at a much higher rate than imports from Germany. By the middle of January 1938 Germany's debt to Latvia had reached the sum of 21.9 million lats. This meant that Latvia was practically giving credits to the aggressor, i.e., was helping him prepare for war.

In exposing this policy of national betrayal the Communist Party of Latvia, and Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party of Latvia and the Young Workers' League of Latvia issued an appeal to the Lettish people entitled "We Shall Not Surrender Latvia to Hitler!" Latvia's fascist leaders, the appeal pointed out, "are concealing the imminent danger from the people. They are concealing it because they do not want to call on the people to fight this danger. They fear all mass movements against Nazism, because any such movement can turn against the dictatorship of their clique".

The deal Great Britain and France struck with Germany and Italy in Munich on September 29-30, 1938 resulted in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, which soon ceased to exist as an independent state. This deal worsened the situation of all small

European states. Latvia's charge d'affaires in Estonia reported on October 26, 1938 that Tallinn regarded as a fait accompli "the division of spheres of influence by Chamberlain and Hitler, with the Germans being given a free hand in the East".

Riga hastened to draw the right "conclusions" from this fact. Late in November 1938 the Latvian Foreign Minister wrote in the magazine *Sējējs* that Latvia should be part of the "new order" not only in the fields of culture, economy, state organisation and in the "concept of the social system" (in which the Latvian ruling circles were "abreast with the epoch"), but also in the "field of foreign policy".

The German envoy in Riga told his US colleague that many members of the Latvian government were ready to hand over Latvia to the Germans. This apparently meant, he said, that they would ask Germany to establish a protectorate over Latvia.

The defeatist attitude of the ruling circles aroused widespread discontent in the republic. Government departments were flooded with reports sent in by the police and the secret political police on the mounting anti-German and anti-government sentiments among the people. The chief of the secret police department in Liepāja reported:

"There is also talk that the Latvian government is too much under Hitler's influence. This has given rise to the suspicion that the government is pursuing a common policy with Germany."

In March 1939 Germany seized Klaipeda and the Klaipeda Territory which belonged to Lithuania. On March 28 the Soviet government handed its statement to the Latvian and Estonian envoys in the USSR. It said that the preservation of the complete independence of the Baltic republics was "not only in the interests of their peoples, but also in the vital interests of the Soviet state". The Soviet government emphasised that the statement was made "in a spirit of sincere goodwill towards the Latvian people". At the same time it made it clear that the USSR could not remain "an indifferent observer of the overt and covert destruction of this sovereignty and independence".

The Soviet government backed up its words with deeds. In the spring and summer of 1939 it conducted talks with Great Britain and France on the formation of a reliable front against the aggressor. During these talks special attention was paid to the provision of guarantees to the Baltic countries. The USSR pointed out that not only direct but also indirect aggression was possible. It defined indirect aggression as an act "to which a state submits

under the threat of force by another power or without such a threat, and which would result in the use of that state's territory and forces for aggression against it or against one of the contracting parties, and consequently lead to the loss of independence by that state or to the violation of its neutrality".

But, as the saying goes, those who do not want to hear are worse than the deaf. The Latvian rulers were betraying their country in the interests of the Hitlerites. On May 22, 1939 the ethnic Germans of Riga marked the twentieth anniversary of the seizure of the Latvian capital by the forces under General von der Goltz. It became an occasion for the fraternisation of the German and Latvian fascists. Speaker after speaker recalled the joint struggle waged against Soviet power in Latvia in 1919. General Verners Tepfers, who officially represented the Latvian government at the ceremony, said:

"If the hour of struggle comes again, I am sure we will stand shoulder to shoulder (with Germany)."

Latvian government spokesmen assured the German envoy in Riga that there were Latvian troops stationed on the republic's eastern frontier and that they were ready to fight the Soviet Union, not Germany. A Latvian Foreign Ministry document read in part:

"The envoy accepted with full understanding the statement that Latvia is oriented militarily only towards the east, which is evidenced by the deployment of our troops."

The result of the fraternisation was the signing on June 7, 1939 of non-aggression pacts between Germany and Latvia and between Germany and Estonia. The official communique practically affirmed the commitment of Latvia and Estonia to renounce the Anglo-Franco-Soviet guarantees. The document read in part:

"The Latvian government and the Estonian government have undertaken to preserve the political independence of their states on their own and strictly to adhere to a policy of neutrality."

In accordance with these commitments, on June 12 the Latvian envoy in London handed to Lord Edward Halifax a note emphasising that the policy of neutrality made it impossible for Latvia to accept guarantees similar to those given to a number of European countries. It was not at all surprising, therefore, that the Latvian and Estonian foreign ministers were awarded the highest German orders for their services to Germany in connection with the signing of the above-mentioned non-aggression pacts and were received by Hitler.

Thus, the front formed by the states which potentially could have resisted the aggressor was breached. This created additional difficulties for the negotiations Great Britain, France and the USSR were conducting on halting German aggression. As a result the Baltic countries were defenceless in the face of Nazi aggression.

When the War Broke Out in Europe

In August 1939 Great Britain and France practically broke off the talks with the Soviet Union on the conclusion of a military convention. Thus, the last opportunity to prevent the outbreak of a second world war was missed. Under these circumstances the Soviet Union was forced to seek other ways of ensuring the safety of its frontiers. When Berlin proposed to conclude a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, the Soviet government decided to accept the proposal in order to hold off the inevitable clash with Germany as long as possible.

However, the USSR did not intend to achieve temporary security for itself at the price of having a regime of Nazi terror set up over the peoples of the Baltic republics and the inhabitants of Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia. The Soviet government realised that a Nazi presence on the Soviet frontiers as a result of German military actions against Poland and possibly the Baltic countries would create an extremely dangerous situation, one fraught with a conflict with the USSR which it was anxious to avoid by signing a non-aggression pact with Germany.

Taking these circumstances into account and also the fact that the USSR was unable alone to check Nazi aggression in Europe, the Soviet government took steps to limit the sphere of this aggression and to prevent Hitler from acquiring advantageous bases for a subsequent attack on the USSR. To this end it demanded as a condition for signing a non-aggression pact that the German government recognise the USSR's historical and strategic interest in preventing German intervention in the affairs of the Baltic countries and former Soviet lands inhabited by Ukrainians and Byelorussians and seized by Poland as a result of the war in 1920.

Thanks to the firm stand taken by the Soviet government at the conclusion of the Soviet-German pact, it was possible to stop Germany's expansion to the east and at least temporarily to save

millions of people from the horrors of the Nazi "new order". It also helped strengthen the USSR's military-strategic positions and those of all the other members of the anti-Hitler coalition on the eve of the Second World War. On August 23, 1939 the Soviet-German non-aggression pact was signed in Moscow.

On September 1, 1939 Nazi Germany attacked Poland. On September 3 Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. The Second World War broke out.

In pursuit of its policy of creating resistance to the aggressor in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union offered to sign mutual aid treaties with the Baltic republics, including Latvia.

Broad sections of the population of these republics were in favour of the conclusion of a mutual aid treaty with the USSR. The Ulmanis government was compelled to consider this circumstance. At a meeting on October 1, 1939 the government, taking into account "the far-reaching changes in the political situation of Eastern Europe", decided that "Latvia should review its relations with other countries and above all clarify its relations with the USSR". To this end a delegation headed by the Latvian Foreign Minister Vilhelms Munters was sent to Moscow.

On October 5 the Soviet-Latvian talks ended in the signing of a mutual aid treaty. The parties undertook "to render one another all possible aid, including military aid, in the event of a direct attack or threat of attack on the part of any great European power", and "not to conclude any alliances or enter into coalitions directed against any of the Contracting Parties".

The Soviet Union also undertook to "assist the Latvian army with arms and other materiel on easy terms".

"To ensure the USSR's security and strengthen its own independence" Latvia granted the Soviet Union "the right to maintain in Liepāja (Libava) and Ventspils (Vindava) naval bases and several airfields on the basis of a lease at a suitable price".

The treaty pointed out that its observance should "in no way affect the sovereign rights of the Contracting Parties, in particular their state system, economic and social systems, and military measures". The areas where the bases were to be situated remained Latvian territory.

On October 9, 1939 *Jaunākās Zinas*, a Riga daily, published an interview given by Vilhelms Munters under the heading "A Treaty Which Strengthens Peace and Security". Noting that the situation in Europe had radically changed after September 1, the minister said that Latvia too was threatened with war. "The

drawing of Latvia into the war was fraught with danger for the Soviet Union," he explained. That was why both countries were interested in preventing a war.

The government paper *Rits* carried the following comment:

"To provide for the defence of its frontiers and of the Baltic Sea the USSR has pledged to render Latvia support and aid in the protection of its shores. This gives us confidence that a mechanism for peace and security has been created in the Baltic Sea area."

Feigning Friendship

The measures taken by the Soviet Union to fortify its Western frontiers enraged politicians in Paris and London who tried to ensure the security of their own countries by urging Hitler to launch his aggressive drive in the east. While the Western Allies were engaged in a phony war without intending to conduct serious operations against the German Army, the French General Staff was working out a project of "direct actions against Russia" as early as September 1939. The idea was that it would be enough to initiate hostilities against the USSR to get the aggressor nations to join in the attack. General Maurice Gamelin, head of the French General Staff, wrote:

"This idea, which had gained currency among French political circles, led us to believe that there would be no serious obstacles to an armed intervention against Russia."

Taking into account the anti-Soviet sentiments among the ruling circles of the Baltic countries the authors of the plan assigned them a major role in it. On October 5, 1939 Jean Mistler, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the French National Assembly, tried to persuade the Latvian envoy in Paris that the Baltic countries should be ready for joint operations against the USSR.

Five days later the chief of the French intelligence service outlined to the same envoy "top secret" plans for the forthcoming operations against the Soviet Union. He made it clear that "the Baltic countries, Finland and the Scandinavian countries must start operations" simultaneously.

These intrigues found a ready response in Riga. All sorts of obstacles were put up to the normal functioning of the Soviet garrisons. In November the Latvian authorities forbade them to

buy foodstuffs and other commodities directly from Latvian firms. The Latvian government passed a law on setting up a special committee for trade. This resulted in sharp price rises and a decrease in the supply of goods.

The Latvian government was trying to hammer together a military alliance of the Baltic countries. In his memoirs General S. Raštikis, former commander-in-chief of the Lithuanian Army, wrote that in 1940 the General Staffs of the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian armies had worked out plans for joint military operations.

The anti-Soviet hysteria in Latvia reached a climax when Ulmanis made a speech over the radio on February 10, 1940. In it he called on his fellow-countrymen to remember that "a moment may come when our young people too will be called on to do other work, carry out other duties... If the crucial, fatal trial comes, on the average one man from every farm would have to put on a uniform... If the matter were not so serious, I would not have mentioned it at this moment..."

In Latvia this speech was regarded as a direct call for preparation for armed action against the Soviet garrisons. It was so interpreted in the leaflets that were distributed in Latvia. The speech was similarly interpreted in the British and French press.

BY THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

Certain quarters are trying to persuade Western public opinion that the revolutionary events which occurred in Latvia in the summer of 1940 were not an expression of popular will but were due to the presence of Soviet troops in the country. As a matter of fact, Soviet troops were stationed in Latvia under the terms of a treaty signed in 1939 and were later reinforced in accordance with an agreement concluded with the Latvian government on June 16, 1940.

How did the people of Latvia themselves regard the revolutionary events? A decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia, dated October 8, 1939, read in part:

"The moral strength of the Lettish people is now superior to the armed force of the Ulmanis clique. If a mass movement against the hated fascist authority emerges under these conditions, it cannot be put down by repressions."

A leaflet distributed by the Communist Party said:

"The government is sitting on a powder keg. Blinded by hatred and greed for enrichment it is unwilling to see that the working people have no more patience."

The political police reported:

"The workers sympathise with the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. They are certain that the revolution will soon triumph."

Government circles did not doubt this either. A political crisis set in. In an attempt to save the situ-

ation a group headed by General Jānis Balodis, War Minister, and Bernhords Einbergs, Minister for Railways, decided in the spring of 1940 without informing Ulmanis to work out a new draft of the country's constitution. However, the attempt failed, and both ministers lost their posts. Ulmanis' associate Mikelis Valters, Latvia's Envoy in Belgium, tried to persuade his "old friend" to give up his dictatorial methods, but without success.

The fascist regime swayed in the opposite direction. It extended Ulmanis' dictatorial powers (Ulmanis now carried out both the functions of the president and the prime minister), calling him the "people's leader", conducted ultranationalistic propaganda and further intensified repressions against the population. The martial law introduced in 1934 was replaced by a law "On Order and Public Security in the Country", which was passed in February 1938 and amended in September 1939. On April 30, 1940 a "Law on the Defence of the State" was promulgated under which all military power was concentrated in the hands of the president.

The leaders of the regime and Latvian society as a whole held different views on the main wartime issue: how to ensure the security and survival of the nation. Meanwhile, internal difficulties had also accumulated.

Anxious Winter

From the beginning of the Second World War, Germany established a blockade of the Baltic Sea. Latvia was thus cut off from the main Western markets and suppliers. In many respects its trade with Germany was a one-way street. From November 1939 to March 1940 Latvia's industrial output fell by more than 25 per cent, and the number of unemployed reached 16,000 to 20,000. This was accompanied by rising prices of prime necessities. The Department for Trade and Industry planned further layoffs in various industries in the summer months which would affect another 10 to 50 per cent of the workers.

To solve the unemployment problem the government decided to introduce forced labour. As early as May 1939 a law was passed on the provision of jobs and distribution of labour. Henceforth a worker could not choose his place of work or take a job without the permission of the Latvian Labour Centre. This body sent many workers to work on farms owned by the rural

bourgeoisie, and to peat fields and timber-cutting camps where the pay was extremely low. In May 1940 a law on labour conscription was passed. Under this law unemployed workers as well as office workers and students were sent to work on farms owned by big landowners. No wonder the workers referred to the Labour Centre as "Slave Centre".

Though strikes were officially banned in Latvia, a strike wave swept the country in the winter of 1939. For instance, 90 per cent of the workers at Riga's shoe factories went on strike, and the crews of merchant ships refused to sail. The struggle of the rural workers was also on the upsurge. Thus, in several localities in Latgale underground revolutionary peasant committees were set up on the initiative of the Communists. There was also growing discontent among other sections of the population.

The government tried to deal with the unrest by making more arrests. From January 1939 to May 1940, 2,506 anti-fascists, including 1,775 in Riga alone, were put behind bars. Among those imprisoned were Jānis Kalnbērzinš, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia, and Zānis Spure and Andrejs Jablonskis, both members of the Central Committee.

On March 3, 1940 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia passed a resolution in which the immediate task of the working-class movement was defined as the "unification of all anti-fascist forces and the overthrow of the fascist dictatorship, and the establishment thereafter of a truly democratic system which would enable the whole of the people to decide how in future to shape Latvia's political and economic life".

In the spring of 1940 the workers of the timber-cutting camps and peat fields went on strike. They returned to towns, while those workers who were being sent to the villages refused to go there. Despite mass arrests of anti-fascists the Latvian working people widely celebrated May Day.

The prestige of the USSR grew among the people in Latvia. They regarded the Soviet Union as the only force capable of defending them against an imminent attack by Nazi Germany.

Agony

The Ulmanis regime was in agony as the internal crisis and the international situation worsened. The preparations for war were stepped up. The phony war in the West came to an end. On April

9, 1940 the Wehrmacht invaded Denmark and Norway. A month later it assumed the offensive against the Anglo-French forces and quickly routed them. Now Berlin thought it was time to reap the fruits of its efforts in strengthening Germany's positions in the Baltic countries.

On May 27 and 29 the Latvian envoy in Berlin informed his government that maps of a "new Europe" were being circulated in Germany. On these maps the Baltic countries were shown as part of Germany. On June 12 he reported to Riga that there was persistent talk in Berlin that Hitler would attack the USSR after Germany's victory in the West. He pointed out:

"If you talk to members of Germany's ruling circles on an official level, you will learn nothing important concerning Soviet-German relations. However, if you approach these same people personally and at a late hour they will tell you that the destruction of Russia is inevitable. I can say without any exaggeration that during the last few weeks I have not met a single German who has not expressed this view."

Such a turn of events prompted the ruling groups of the Baltic countries to collaborate with Germany on an ever broader scale. In their view Germany alone could save them from the wrath of their own peoples. Under secret agreements reached with Berlin up to 70 per cent of the exports of the Baltic countries (worth nearly 200 million marks) went to the Third Reich during the first six months of 1940. This was being done in flagrant violation of the mutual aid treaties signed with the USSR.

On June 16, 1940 the Soviet government handed a note to the Latvian envoy in Moscow, pointing out that Latvia was violating the terms of the Soviet-Latvian Mutual Aid Treaty. It also raised the question of the ability of the Latvian government to ensure the proper implementation of the treaty and the formation of a new government. To prevent possible provocations against Soviet garrisons stationed in Latvia the Soviet government asked Latvia for permission to bring additional Soviet military units into its territory.

On that day the Latvian government held an extraordinary meeting. Having agreed to the bringing in of additional Red Army units the government resigned. A spokesman of the Latvian Army went to the frontier to conduct talks with the Soviet command and to sign an agreement on the procedure for the entry and deployment of the Red Army units.

The socialist revolution overthrew the fascist dictatorship. A new People's Government came to power.
In the photo: Dr. Augusts Kirhenšteins, head of the People's Government, delivering a speech.

Political Crisis

On June 17, 1940 Red Army units began to arrive in Latvia. The British envoy in Riga reported to London that a sizable part of the population met the Soviet troops with cheers and flowers.

These developments were not at all to the liking of the fascist authorities. When the first Soviet tanks appeared at Zemgale Bridge in Riga large numbers of people welcomed them with enthusiasm. Mounted police and military units tried to disperse the crowds. On June 18 a state of siege was introduced in Riga.

To justify these measures the authorities claimed that "the behaviour of the people in the city produced a most unfavourable impression on the Soviet troops, and the Soviet command approached the Latvian authorities with a request to remove the obstacles to the movement of the troops".

In this connection the Soviet embassy issued a statement saying that "the Soviet command had made no such requests to

Hundreds of political prisoners were released from prison by the People's Government.

the Latvian authorities and that their announcement did not in any way correspond to reality. The people did not interfere with the movement of the troops, and the Soviet command was highly pleased with the cordial welcome the population extended to them."

Tension in the country continued to mount. On June 19 large columns of demonstrators appeared in the streets in Liepāja calling for the resignation of the government, and the police were forced to withdraw. Although the government had introduced a state of siege in the whole of the country it could no longer halt the revolutionary upsurge of the masses.

Certain bourgeois elements tried to take advantage of the situation. However, they had practically no support among the militant masses and were indeed outstripped by events. Led by the Communists the working people of Riga were preparing for a major demonstration that was to demand the formation of an anti-fascist people's front government. On June 20 the workers of Liepāja took over the main offices and services in the city and called for the overthrow of the fascist regime. The revolution was taking on an irreversible character in other towns and cities too.

Elections to the Sejm (July 1940).

A rally in Riga. The working people demanded that Soviet power be established in Latvia and that a request be forwarded to the government of the USSR for the admission of the republic to the Union.

From the very beginning of the revolution the Communist Party of Latvia enjoyed great prestige among the people. It proved to be the best-organised force in the country. On June 20 Ulmanis, realising that his defeat was inevitable, was forced to make concessions to the people and form a new, people's government. The president appointed Professor Augusts Kirhenšteins, a prominent democratic-minded public figure, head of the new government.

The working people welcomed the formation of a people's government. On June 21 over 70,000 people took to the streets of Riga to greet the anti-fascists just released from prison.

When the demonstrators assembled in front of the Government House, they were addressed by Dr. Kirhenšteins, the minister-president. He said:

"Speaking on behalf of the new government I congratulate you, working people of Latvia. The old government has fallen. It is not our intention to remain here for months or years to come, we shall only remain until we are able to lead Latvia along a better road, until we draft a Constitution for the working people, so that you will be able to elect those who you think are worthy of fighting for your future."

Then Vilis Lācis, a well-known writer, read out the declaration of the People's Government. It read in part:

"The new government has set itself the task of improving the material and spiritual well-being of the people, ensuring the freedoms and rights of the people, protecting the interests of the state and all citizens regardless of their property status, religion, education or nationality...

"The new government regards it as its primary task to ensure the strict observance of the mutual aid treaty concluded between Latvia and the Soviet Union on October 5, 1939, and subsequently to forge, on the basis of this treaty, a firm alliance between Latvia and the Soviet Union and resolutely stop any attempts to hinder the fulfilment of this vital national task...

"In its foreign policy the government will abide by the principles that will help strengthen peaceful and friendly relations with all states, the Soviet Union above all."

On June 21-23, 1940 there were also mass demonstrations in support of the people's government and its programme in Liepāja, Rēzekne, Jelgava, Ventspils, Valmiera, Daugavpils, Kuldiga, Aizpute, Cēsis and other localities.

Thus, the socialist revolution triumphed in Latvia in a peaceful

way. The Latvian bourgeoisie was unable to offer any serious resistance to the working people and to unleash a civil war. The Red Army units had no part in these developments, although their presence helped to prevent attempts "to export counter-revolution" to the country. The bourgeoisie received no help from outside, as it did in 1918-1920, and was therefore unable to preserve its power by betraying the nation's interests. The myth about the "occupation" of Latvia and the seizure of power "under cover of Soviet tanks" appeared later when the Western and Latvian bourgeoisie tried to find an excuse to justify their moral and political defeat.

In June 1940 the transfer of power to the people's government did not call forth any statements or protests on the part of foreign states. On June 26 the envoys of the USA, Great Britain, France and other countries accredited in Riga paid official calls to Dr. Kirhenšteins who was also the Foreign Minister. This in effect was an act of recognition of the legitimacy of the people's government of Latvia by the international community.

Towards a New Life

On June 22, 1940 *Ciņa*, the central organ of the Communist Party of Latvia, appeared on sale legally at the newsstands for the first time in many years. The front page carried an editorial entitled "The Road to Our Victory". It read in part:

"The years 1905, 1917, 1919 and 1940 marked the stages on our road to victory. We will not stop half-way. The historic hour has struck... We are heading towards a new and better life... The time has come to draw on the creative forces of the working class, the working peasantry and all working people in general, to work ten times more energetically. If the government relies on these forces its efforts will be crowned with success."

To secure success along this road the Communist Party of Latvia decided to include Communists in the government. Arnolds Tabaks, Jānis Vanags and Kārlis Karlsons received the portfolios of state controller and ministers of agriculture and finance respectively. The other members of the government belonged to no parties since in those days there were no other parties in Latvia.*

* Before the 1934 coup some of them belonged to parties that had been disbanded by the Ulmanis regime.

The Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party of Latvia was an ally of the Communist Party in the united workers' front. On June 23 it published a declaration calling on its supporters to transform the united front with the Communist Party of Latvia into a single party.*

Democratisation was accompanied by the purging of the state machine and reorganisation of the local government bodies. On the initiative of the workers and peasants of Liepāja, Ventspils, Griva and Alsunga as early as June 20-22, the government passed a law on June 23 on the disarmament of the *aisargi* detachments.

From the outset it was decided to democratise the army. To this end the government passed a law on July 4 on the appointment of political leaders in military units.

Industry was another field of battle between the old and the new. When the entrepreneurs tried to curtail production and sabotage the government's social and economic policy, workers' control was introduced in the industries. Workers' organisations began to function again. By a government decision the notorious Labour Centre was abolished.

Elections to the People's Sejm

The parliament having been dissolved in 1934, the working people of Latvia demanded the convening of a Sejm with the powers of a constituent assembly which would decide on the future state structure. On July 4, 1940 the government announced general elections to be held on July 14-15.

On that same day the electoral law was adopted. Since the fascist regime had abolished the Constitution, the government drafted the new law on the basis of the electoral law of 1922. Amendments were introduced with the aim of further democratising the 1922 law. The elections were conducted on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. Any organisation or group of citizens could nominate candidates provided the list they proposed was signed by at least 100 voters.

On July 5, 1940 a meeting of elected representatives of

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* When the party's rank-and-file members responded favourably to the call, the Central Committee of the Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party passed a decision on July 3, 1940 on dissolving the party.

workers was held in Riga, which submitted a list of candidates of the Latvian Working People's Bloc. This bloc comprised all 26 sectoral trade unions, the Young Workers' League of Latvia, students' associations, associations of servicemen, cultural, sports and many other societies and organisations and also, naturally, the Communist Party.

On July 6 the election platform of the Working People's Bloc was published, which stated the demands of the Bloc. In the sphere of internal policy it envisaged the granting of land to landless peasants and peasants with little land, their release from payment of arrears in taxes and debts, improvement of the living standards of factory workers and office employees, implementation of important social measures, organisation of a broad network of medical services and children's establishments, radical democratisation of the army and ensurance of the freedom of speech, the press, assembly and association. In the sphere of foreign policy the Bloc advanced the slogan of "friendship between Latvia and the peoples of the Soviet Union, and a firm and inviolable alliance between the Latvian Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics".

The publication of an election programme and its broad discussion were required under the electoral law. This gave the people an unprecedented opportunity to discuss in conditions of broad publicity the problems affecting everybody. At rallies held on July 6 in Riga, Liepāja and Jelgava thousands of people expressed their full support for the election platform of the Working People's Bloc. Later similar rallies and meetings were held in other cities and towns.

As expected, the election battle was a bitter one. The former War Minister Jānis Balodis, the lawyer Vuldemārs Zamuels, the former Minister-President and later ambassador to Germany Hugo Celminš and others set up a Committee of Democratic Latvian Electors for Elections to the Sejm. They published a Memorandum of Democratic Latvian Electors. Though these politicians had compromised themselves by working with the fascist Ulmanis regime and were known to have had a hand in the abolition even of bourgeois freedoms *in Latvia*, now they tried to pose as champions of democracy. The committee demagogically promised to work for democratic freedoms, for providing land to the peasants, and for friendship with the Soviet Union. This was an obvious attempt to "steal" the slogans of revolutionary dem-

ocrats. It also reflected the political atmosphere in Latvia at the time.

In characterising this group *Ciņa* wrote:

"These politicians never cared about the welfare of the people, about the interests of the people. And if they are appealing to the people today, the people whom they had always exploited, they are pursuing obvious aims. They want to split the united forces of the people and get elected to the Sejm so that they can conduct policies which are hostile to the people."

The Memorandum of Democratic Latvian Electors did not win any support at election rallies. In fact, the working people demanded that the election commissions not register the lists that included the names of outright reactionaries.

The platform of the Working People's Bloc was highly popular among the people. In a number of places the bourgeoisie took over its slogans in an attempt to get its representatives elected to the Sejm. Thus, in Talsi District the former *aisargi*, speculators and other bourgeois elements submitted a list of candidates nominated by "non-party fishermen, small proprietors, handicraftsmen, workers and middle-class people". In exposing these schemes *Talsu Aprinķa Ziņotājs* wrote:

"The authors of the list of 'fishermen' belong to those circles which had been in power all these years. Then they did not wish to hear anything about the needs of the fishermen living in poverty. And now, like inveterate swindlers, these gentlemen have laid down in their election promises the demands that have been brought forth by the Working People's Bloc."

In this and other similar cases the election commissions, proceeding from the clauses of the electoral law, ruled the petitions on the nomination of candidates invalid. The bourgeoisie was not deprived of the right to vote, but its forces were disorganised and demoralised in the face of the rapid development of events and the activity of the people. The bourgeoisie did not have a uniform plan or a united leadership. In the election battle it was unable to put up serious resistance to the working people. Of the 17 lists only 5—those submitted by the Working People's Bloc—met the requirements of the electoral law. And it was these that were registered in the five electoral districts.

The elections were held in a festive atmosphere. Altogether 1,181,323 people, or 94.8 per cent of the total number of registered voters, took part in the elections. On July 17 the Central Election Commission published the election results which

The soldiers of the Latvian Army sided with the working people.

showed a clear victory for the Working People's Bloc. It won 1,155,807 votes, or 97.8 per cent of the total number of votes cast. Well-known revolutionaries, including J. Kalnbērziņš, Z. Spure, R. Neilands, F. Deglavs, M. Birkenfelde, P. Plēsums, I. Paldina, A. Matisons and others were elected to the Sejm. Among the newly elected deputies were also prominent scientists and scholars, writers and public leaders, such as A. Kirhenšteins, V. Lācis, V. Latkovskis, J. Pabērzs, P. Galenieks, J. Lācis, A. Upits, A. Buševics and A. Rudevics.

When the results were announced people thronged the streets in Riga and other towns and cities. In Riga alone over 100,000 people took part in the demonstration. Commenting on the event *Ciņa* wrote:

"Riga has not witnessed such a broad demonstration for a long time. Civil servants, local government employees, servicemen and children marched side by side with workers many of whom were in blue overalls. Women marched together with the men. And next to a Lett you would see a Russian, a Jew and

people of other nationalities. This was truly a people's demonstration in the broadest sense of the word."

The Historic Hour Struck

The People's Sejm of Latvia held its first session at the National Theatre in Riga on July 21. The day before Ulmanis resigned as the country's president,* and his duties were temporarily taken over by Dr. A. Kirhenšteins, the Minister-President.

The session was opened by Dāvids Krūze, a peasant, who was the oldest deputy. Peteris Briedis was elected president of the Sejm. Then the agenda was approved.

A delegation of workers from Riga welcomed the opening of the People's Sejm and told the assembled deputies:

"We demand that you form a Soviet Latvia which the international bourgeoisie took away from us on May 22, 1919. We demand that Latvia join the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Only as a constituent republic of the USSR will Latvia be assured complete independence and sovereignty."

The Sejm heard a report by Dr. A. Kirhenšteins on the work of the government. It unanimously commended the government for the work it had done and extended its term of office. Then Deputy Z. Spure, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia, delivered a speech on state power.

The People's Sejm unanimously adopted a declaration on this issue and proclaimed Latvia a Soviet Socialist Republic. Henceforth power in Latvia was transferred to "the working people of town and countryside who will be represented by Soviets of deputies".

The Western diplomats who attended the opening ceremony of the Sejm found the restoration of Soviet power in Latvia not to their liking. In attending the ceremony they in fact recognised the legitimacy of the People's Sejm. However, they were unwilling to recognise the right of the people to decide their own destiny. They staged a walkout as soon as the Sejm adopted the Declaration on State Power. But the walkout did not impress the deputies at all.

Then Vilis Lācis, a writer, took the floor. He said:

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* Until then all acts of the People's Government had to be approved by President Ulmanis. After his resignation Ulmanis asked the Sejm to grant him a pension.

№№	Pavēles un rikojumi	Atzīmes par izpildīšanu
395	1940. gada 21 jūlijā, plkst 12. Saskaņā ar šī g 20 jūlija likumu (V 162) par Valsts Prezidenta amata izpildīšanu nolieku Valsts Prezidenta amata pienākumus Ministru Prezidenta Dr. ku gustam Kirchenšteinam. Valsts Prezidents Kārlis Ulmanis	

Ulmanis' note on the transfer of presidential duties to Dr. Kirhenšteins.

"After a long period of oppression when the people of Latvia were deprived of all rights, they can now freely decide their destiny and determine their future. The great historic hour has struck. All our great dreams are to come true. The last barriers that until now have separated us from the peoples of the Soviet Union must disappear. The great and happy hour has arrived when the friendship that exists between Latvia and the Soviet Union must be given legal form once and for all."

The People's Sejm unanimously decided to ask the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to incorporate Latvia into the Soviet Union on the same conditions as the other Soviet Republics. The resolution read in part:

"Latvia can heal the wounds inflicted on it during the long period of slavery only as a member of the family of the peoples of the Soviet Union. The Lettish people can develop their economy and their national culture, ensure national equality, provide peace, bread and real freedom to the working people of Latvia only with the help of their great friend—the USSR, as an equal member of the Soviet Union."

The People's Sejm elected a Plenipotentiary Commission which was to go to Moscow.

Together Again

The People's Sejm not only proclaimed Soviet power; on July 22 it adopted a declaration on the nationalisation of the land, banks and the big industries. On July 23 it elected a commission whose task was to draw up the draft of a new Constitution. It was headed by Z. Spure.

In August-September 1940 an agrarian reform was carried out on the basis of the Declaration on the Land and the Law on the Land adopted by the Latvian government on July 30. The largest plot now did not exceed 30 hectares. The surplus land taken away from the rural bourgeoisie was handed over to the farm labourers and peasants who had little land. As a result of the reform 51,760 formerly landless peasants received 524,517 hectares of land, while 23,321 small farms received additional plots of land with a total area of 72,544 hectares. Peasants were also given considerable material aid.

The industries were nationalised in stages. In June 1941 the socialist sector already accounted for 95 per cent of the total industrial output. The socialist and cooperative trade enterprises accounted for 90 per cent of the commodity turnover.

On August 5, 1940 the Supreme Soviet of the USSR discussed the question of the admission of Latvia to the Union. Dr. Kirhenšteins, head of the Plenipotentiary Commission elected by the People's Sejm, read out the declaration of the People's Sejm on Latvia's joining the Soviet Union. He expressed the hope that the request of the Lettish people would be granted.

That same day the USSR Supreme Soviet unanimously approved a law on admitting Latvia to the USSR "as an equal Union Soviet Socialist Republic". On the following day mass demonstrations in support of this decision were held in Riga, Liepāja, Ventspils, Cēsis, Gulbene and Ludza.

On August 24, 1940 an extraordinary session of the People's Sejm was convened to discuss and approve the Constitution of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. Submitting the draft of the Fundamental Law, Z. Spure, Chairman of the Constitutional Commission, said:

"The task of the Constitutional Commission was to prepare a Draft Constitution providing for the creation of a Soviet state system in accordance with the wishes of the working class, the peasantry and the working intelligentsia... We have drafted a

The entire population of Riga went to see the Plenipotentiary Commission of the People's Sejm off. The people's envoys were going to Moscow to present a request to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the admission of Latvia to the Soviet Union.

Constitution in accordance with the wishes of the people. Today we are submitting it to the Sejm for discussion and adoption."

After each article was discussed the Draft was adopted unanimously on August 25. The text of the Constitution read in part:

"The Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic is a socialist state of workers and peasants.

"The political foundation of the Latvian SSR is the Soviets of Working People's Deputies, and the economic foundation is the socialist economic system and socialist ownership of the implements and means of production. Socialist ownership of the implements and means of production has been established in order to abolish completely exploitation of man by man and to build a socialist society.

"To ensure mutual assistance in the fields of economy, politics

З А К О Н

О ПРИНЯТИИ ЛАТВИЙСКОЙ СОВЕТСКОЙ СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ В СОЮЗ СОВЕТСКИХ СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКИХ РЕСПУБЛИК.

Заслушав заявление Полномочной Комиссии Сейма Латвии, Верховный Совет Союза Советских Социалистических Республик

п о с т а н о в л я е т:

1. Удовлетворить просьбу Сейма Латвии и принять Латвийскую Советскую Социалистическую Республику в Союз Советских Социалистических Республик в качестве равноправной Союзной Советской Социалистической Республики.

2. Провести в соответствии со ст.ст.34 и 35 Конституции (Основного Закона) СССР выборы депутатов в Верховный Совет СССР от Союзной Латвийской Советской Социалистической Республики.

3. Поручить Президиуму Верховного Совета СССР назначить день выборов.

Председатель Президиума
Верховного Совета СССР -
(М.Калинин)

Секретарь Президиума
Верховного Совета СССР -
(А.Горкин)

Москва. Кремль.
5 августа 1940г.

The text of the Law on the Admission of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic to the USSR. The document was signed by Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

and defence the Latvian SSR has voluntarily united, on equal terms, with the other Soviet Socialist Republics within the framework of a federal state. As a member of the USSR Latvia retains

its sovereign rights, including the right freely to secede from the USSR."

The highest body of state authority in the Latvian SSR was the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR elected on the basis of universal, equal, and direct suffrage by secret ballot. The citizens of Latvia also had the right to elect their representatives to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. In the localities the bodies of state authority were the district, city, settlement and village Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

The Constitution took account of the concrete historical experience of the building of socialism in Latvia. The private ownership of small industrial and trade enterprises was preserved. Individual farms and shops of handicraftsmen continued to exist. The land of individual farms was allotted to peasant households with limits established by the law.

The Constitution guaranteed citizens of the Latvian SSR not only socio-political rights, such as national equality, equal rights for women and men, suffrage, freedom of speech, of the press and of assembly, but also broad socio-economic rights (not granted by the bourgeois constitution), such as the right to work, leisure and rest, education, and maintenance in old age and in the event of sickness or disability.

Having approved the Constitution, the People's Sejm passed a decision proclaiming itself, until the next general elections, the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR. Dr. A. Kirhenšteins was elected Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. A new government—the Council of People's Commissars of the Latvian SSR—was formed. It was headed by Vilis Lācis.

On January 12, 1941 elections of deputies from the Latvian SSR to the USSR Supreme Soviet were held. A. Kirhenšteins became an *ex officio* Vice-Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The Lettish people were able to participate actively, through their elected representatives, in the administration of the federal state—the USSR.

ONE YEAR AS COMPARED TO TWENTY YEARS

The falsifiers of history like to express "sympathy" for the Lettish people who, they say, are a victim of communism. However, if one compares the record of the twenty years of bourgeois rule in Latvia with the changes carried out in the republic within one year before the outbreak of the Second World War, one will see what really happened in Latvia.

The deliveries and orders from other Union Republics enabled Latvia quickly to overcome its economic crisis and to put into operation dozens of factories and plants that had stood idle. When Soviet power was restored there were thousands of unemployed in the republic. One year later every one of them had a job.

The state's expenditures on social needs went up sharply. The number of people receiving state pensions and sickness and disability benefits rose considerably, and the allowances paid to mothers of large families were raised. Free medical aid was introduced. A whole range of measures were carried out in the sphere of mother and child care.

The agrarian reform brought about far-reaching changes in the countryside. Peasant households were released from payment of arrears in taxes and debts. In 1940 loans amounting to 14 million roubles were granted to new farmers. In 1941 they were given an additional loan of 3,400,000 roubles for the purchase of horses.

In view of a bad harvest due to unfavourable

weather conditions, the government of the USSR came to the aid of the Latvian peasants. The republic received large quantities of concentrated fodder which was sold to the peasants at low prices. Large quantities of farm machinery were shipped to Latvia.

Education became free and accessible to all in Latvia. In 1935, 11 per cent of the population were illiterate (in Latgale—27 per cent), including 106,500 people aged from 15 to 20 years who could not write, and 78,400 who could neither read nor write. After Soviet power was restored 38,000 started to attend literacy classes. Fifty-one schools with 467 classrooms were opened. By autumn 1941 it was intended to build nine more secondary schools and 29 primary schools in the countryside. Special courses were opened for children of workers and peasants, which were to prepare them for entry into higher educational establishments. All students attending these courses were maintained by the state. Early in 1941 a committee was appointed to set up a national Academy of Sciences.

The Second World War became the watershed that separated the old from the new. Just before Nazi Germany attacked the USSR the class struggle in Latvia became extremely acute. Acting in a completely dishonourable manner the nationalistic bourgeoisie of Latvia collaborated with the German invaders—the historical enemies of the Lettish people. An attempt was made to form a "fifth column". The attempt failed, however, owing to the firm measures taken by the Latvian government and the total lack of popular support.

During the occupation Latvian fascists and officials of the deposed Ulmanis regime played the role of Nazi henchmen. It may be recalled that Gustovs Celmins, leader of the fascist organisation Pērkonkrusts, returned to Latvia in the trains of the Wehrmacht. In March 1942 the Nazis set up a puppet government in Latvia headed by Oskars Dankers, a former general of the bourgeois army. Aleksandrs Plensners, a former Latvian military attaché in Germany, proved to be a faithful disciple of the Nazis. He was appointed a regimental commander in the Latvian SS Legion.

It was politicians like these who had twice betrayed their people that formed the core of the "captive nation". And Washington has spared no efforts to defend them. It is they who are now broadcasting programmes about the "liberation" of Latvia. Professional demagogues who have regarded the Lettish people only as a milch cow are now "earning a living" by taking part in the

generously funded ideological war against the USSR. Regrettably, some Letts who due to various circumstances find themselves outside their homeland are at times taken in by them.

But perhaps those funds amounting to millions of dollars are allocated for the establishment of historical truth and the restoration of the rights of the Letts? Not at all. Being unable to undermine the social and political unity of Soviet society, its enemies are trying to disunite the nations and nationalities inhabiting the USSR. For instance, in September 1986, at a Soviet-US meeting in Jurmala, a big resort on the shore of the Gulf of Riga, several US officials declared that they did not recognise Soviet Latvia. This despite the fact that the Helsinki Final Act, which affirms the inviolability of the postwar frontiers in Europe, had been signed by the President of the United States.

Let us look at the facts. Latvia is a sovereign state within the Soviet Union. As a Soviet Socialist Republic it was formed in accordance with the wishes of the Lettish people expressed in free general elections. Latvia exercises its own state power. This power is not a derivative of all-Union authority; nor has it been delegated by the highest bodies of the Union. The republic has its own system of higher and local bodies of state authority and administration. It also has its own Constitution and legislation.

Having become a part of the USSR, Latvia has strengthened its independence and sovereignty. By delegating some of its rights to the USSR, Latvia has been able to take advantage of the political, economic and military might of the USSR to defend its interests. For instance, today it is hard to imagine that anyone would try to infringe upon Latvia's political or economic interests. Meanwhile, Latvia takes an equal part in the formulation and conduct of the Soviet Union's home and foreign policies, and also in the formation of the higher central representative bodies. Both under the Constitution of the USSR and the Constitution of the Latvian SSR, the republic has the right freely to secede from the Union. And this right cannot be abolished, changed or limited in terms of time or by any reservations.

To sum up, it may be said that the restoration of Soviet power and reunification with the world's first workers' and peasants' state were not only a logical outcome of the development of the Lettish people's historical ties with the Russian and other neighbouring peoples, and the result of their joint revolutionary struggle over a period of many years, but also an important factor of progress. Having become a real master of their socialist state

the Lettish people were able to achieve notable successes in fraternal cooperation with the other peoples inhabiting the Soviet Union. While preserving and advancing their own culture the Lettish socialist nation is at the same time a component of the united Soviet people.

The Letts are aware of their achievements and are able to compare the past with the present. In the years 1945-1950, when the rehabilitation of the war-ravaged economy was under way, the USSR's average annual growth of industrial output was 13.6 per cent. The corresponding figure for Latvia was 45 per cent. In 1985 Latvia's industrial output increased 53 times as compared to 1940. This rate of industrial growth was possible only thanks to Latvia's fruitful cooperation with all the other Union Republics. The fraternal aid Latvia received did not result in colossal debts or the plunder of its national wealth.

Since Soviet power was restored in Latvia it has built 470 schools for 273,400 students. The number of teachers increased from 9,000 in 1940 to 24,800 in 1981. The Latvian State University named after Peteris Stučka, with 10 departments training students in 25 specialities, has a total enrollment of 11,000. Throughout the period of its existence bourgeois Latvia trained fewer specialists with a higher education. In 1939 there were 278,000 people in Latvia with a secondary or higher education; today this figure has exceeded one million. Thus, practically one of every two inhabitants of the republic has a secondary or higher education.

Those who are willing to see will see the truth.

ЛАТВИЯ: ВЫБОР, СДЕЛАННЫЙ ДВАЖДЫ. 1917—1940.

на английском языке

Цена 35 к.

LATVIA:

A Path Chosen Twice

1917-1940